



scribkin

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My Real Fake iPhone 3Gs

Of course, once I got home I immediately upgraded my iPhone 3G to the latest 3.0 firmware. After the interminable download, sync and install process, I got my first glimpse at the new front page. Almost immediately, I noticed that I not only had a battery icon, but also the *percentage of battery power remaining!*

My first thought was that it was a new feature of the OS. I was pleased, but not completely surprised, because I had a bit of a secret. You see, once upon a time I used a jailbreak on my phone. It was a heady time for me, running two apps simultaneously, recording video with Qik, and most importantly *using a hack that turns the battery icon to a percentage view*. And, once I decided to un-jailbreak, all my various interface hacks and other things vanished, except for that surreptitious little battery percentage toggle.

Through a couple of iPhone OS updates the battery hack stayed with me, apparently hidden away in some configuration setting or firmware file. And apparently, that setting triggered a feature that is only meant for the iPhone 3Gs when the firmware installed. Excellent!

What's weird is that this is distinctly different from how it appeared on older firmware revisions. Gone is the ability to tap on the battery to toggle it to a percent.. now both appear, all the time. And of course, since I don't have a 3Gs, there is no setting in the Usage menu for me to turn it off. Good thing I like it.

Now how do I tell my iPhone to play music through my bluetooth headset? sigh.

More discussions on this:

[Phone 3.0 comes with battery percentage meter – The iPhone User Guide](#)

[How to get battery percentage in 3.0- \[Archive\] – Mac Forums](#)

[iphone 3g battery percentage.. am i lucky-](#)

[Battery % Hack – Mac Forums](#)

Default Font

We have had our web experience controlled by the sites we visit for so long that for a lot of us, the web browser defaults no longer even come in to play when controlling what the text on a web page looks like, except

in the case where we want to *override* whatever choice the site we are visiting has made.

This isn't a rant. I actually think, by and large, that this is a good thing. CSS (or Cascading Style Sheets) allows precise control over the overall look of web sites, and when you are trying to walk that line between *clean* and *detailed*, CSS can be the razor that keeps your site from looking too busy or too cluttered. There are many precise tweaks that can enhance the *presentability* of a site, like the vertical spacing between lines of text.

But, as you have no doubt noticed, this site doesn't employ CSS to force a particular font type, size, style, or color. Those are all left up to the choices you have made in your *browser settings*, and if you are anything like me, you probably haven't even looked at your browser font defaults for *years*.

Then end result? 10-point Times New Roman, with blue unvisited links and purple visited links.

If you absolutely hate serif fonts (fonts that have little twiddly bits on the letters like Times New Roman), take a moment to go in to your settings and select a different font that is more pleasing. You can choose any font that you have installed, from Helvetica (or Arial for you Windows folks) to something more exotic like Calibri on Windows (the new MS Office default font) to Monaco on the Mac.

All the browsers except Chrome have a font setting in their options. Google Chrome, created with minimalism in mind, forces you to edit a configuration file to change your font defaults. I found where this configuration resides from a Chrome Help Discussion Board:

Using text editor to open:

```
... \Documents and Settings\User_Name\Local Settings  
 \Application Data\Google\Chrome\User Data\Default\Preferences
```

*You will find the "webkit": { "webprefs": { in the file.
Those settings are for WebKit.*

In my setting example:

```
"webkit": {  
  "webprefs": {  
    "default_fixed_font_size": 11,  
    "default_font_size": 12,  
    "fixed_font_family": "Bitstream Vera Sans Mono",
```

```
    "minimum_font_size": 12,  
    "minimum_logical_font_size": 12,  
    "sansserif_font_family": "Times New Roman",  
    "serif_font_family": "Arial",  
    "standard_font_is_serif": false,  
    "text_areas_are_resizable": true  
  }  
}
```

The `minimum_font_size` and `minimum_logical_font_size` prevent Chrome from displaying a very small font size for display.

Remember to close Chrome first before you edit the file, or the file will be overwritten by Chrome after exiting.

If Google Chrome has the most annoying default font configuration, Safari 4 possibly has the best. Not only is it easy to find, but if you are viewing a page that uses the default browser font (like this one) selecting a font will immediately update the page with that font, allowing you to see immediately if it's a good choice or not.

Of course, as more and more sites adopt CSS-heavy themes in an attempt to give you a unique and identifiable look, these settings become less relevant. Maybe that's the lesson we can take away about Chrome – they've already decided that default fonts should be set once (by the developer) and forgotten.

New Theme, New Thoughts, Less Fluff

I haven't been doing much writing recently.

Anywhere.

After an extremely fun couple of months writing for [ReadWriteWeb](#) (thanks again for making that possible, [Richard!](#) Your team is absolutely the best folks to work with!) I found a full-time job working for [CyberSource](#), working on the operations/support piece for a new product they (we) are developing for electronic payment processing. Sounds boring, doesn't it?

In fact, I am learning and applying new technologies at a prodigious rate. I'm using Linux admin and deployment skills that, frankly, have gotten a bit rusty in the year I spent immersed in new media. And it is challenging me.. which also means that when I meet goals and deadlines,

I feel good. Also, I am writing a lot – but now in the form of documentation around the project. That combined with just wanting to come home and relax after a hard day has definitely made me step back from the active role I had on various social media sites and blogs.

But there are still times I find myself with an hour here or there, and I fire up [Feedly](#) or [Google Reader](#), hit GA (go-all) and start skimming from the top. And the blog-o-sphere continues apace, weaving its own curiously compelling tapestry of news, insights, discussion, and often overwhelming coverage of larger events, and it makes me a bit nostalgic (if such could be said for something that I've only been away from for a couple of months).

In any case, these changes have made me see my own works from a fresh perspective. I've decided, for now, a fancy blog theme is not important. A lot of bells and whistles are not important. I just want something simple, maybe even *too* simple, that I can use as a framework to build upon. To that end, I have chosen a [theme](#) that is fast and doesn't waste a lot of time with CSS. I'm hoping with its limited potential for distracting eye-candy, it will also help me to focus on content.

I do need to figure out how to show the number of comments a post has on the front page though. That's a big omission. For now, you can click on an article title to get to the comments (if there are any).

I don't know if there's still a lot of you out there cheering Scribkin on, or even just patiently (or bemusedly) waiting for a new post to appear, but if you are, thanks. I'll try to write here at least every weekend.

Update: I figured out how to add a comments link. Time for a nap.

Three Weeks In and Still Kicking

I've been criminally lacking on updating this blog since taking a writing position at [ReadWriteWeb](#). I admit it. But I do have an idea about the direction I want to take this blog, and hopefully, if I keep plugging at it, people will find it to be useful.

However, I'm mostly writing this today for two reasons:

1. To figure out if writing a post will 'reboot' my broken FeedBurner feed into working, and
2. To gloat a little about *just how much* I've been blogging over at RWW recently.

Of The First Part

So, starting with the [Google FeedBurner](#) issue. I have no idea what it is, and I honestly haven't had much time or motivation to futz with it recently. I suspect it is similar to something that happened to Louis Gray recently (which you can read about here), but I'm not sure at all. If I view the RSS feed in Mozilla, I get something that looks like this:

But if I look at it in Chrome (which strangely has absolutely NO support for viewing RSS feeds), I get this:

So, I'm not sure what's going on. I'm going to post this, and if that doesn't fix it I guess I'll go into the Feedburner "hit it with a hammer" section and see if I can knock something loose.

Of The Second Part

They've been keeping me busy over at RWW. Generally, three posts a day, every weekday. That's 15 posts a week, and I've been doing it for several weeks now. There's actually a [handy little RWW link](#) that lists all the posts I wrote, and the number of comments on each. So, that's awesome.

Plus, week I went to SXSW Interactive on a press pass, and that was a total blast! It was so amazing to finally meet everyone that I have been reading and following in online, I forgot about blogging at all until a couple of days in. Sorry, RWW.

Update: I figured out the RSS feed issue. It was a plugin called GooseGrade. Updated the plugin and the feed is fixed. Yay!

What Has Two Thumbs and Writes for ReadWriteWeb? This guy.

Last week, literally out of the blue, I got an email from [Richard MacManus](#), founder of [ReadWriteWeb](#). He said that the blog had an opening for a news blogger, and would I be interested? Say no more, I replied. I am *just a bit more* than slightly interested.

In fact, I was thrilled.

So, after setting some timetables and learning the ropes, I can finally announce that I am RWW's newest [daily news blogger](#)! I will be providing the tech and new media communities updates every weekday

afternoon. In fact, I've already begun, you can already check out my very first RWW post [here](#). We slipped it in Sunday night as a sort of test.

That's not all the good news, however.

Apparently, though a series of what I can only believe to be fortuitous coincidences, **I managed to score a press pass to South by Southwest Interactive this year!** *Oh my yes, I'll be there representing RWW!*

It took me a while to pick my jaw off the floor when the team revealed this news to me, as you may imagine.

Now before you start wondering if I somehow deposed a more capable, seasoned writer.. as far as I know, I didn't. It happened to be the case where due to prior commitments (and perhaps the fact that I live near Austin) it was available. But I'm not looking this gift horse in the mouth! I'm just going to try my hardest to prove that their gamble with me pays off for everyone concerned.

So that's my news. I honestly don't know how it is going to affect my posting frequency here and other blogs that I write for, such as [Louis Gray's](#) site yet. Time will tell. But please do follow me over on RWW as often as you can, and know that I am certainly open to post ideas, suggestions and recommendations.

I Am Blogger: Louis Gray

*This is part 1 of Scribkin's **I Am Blogger** series, which started out with [this post](#).*

A lot has been written about, and *by*, a guy who has seen his reputation in social media grow, often exponentially, over the past year. He has been writing about technology and new media for just a hair over twice that time period on his own eponymous blog. Oddly, his income is not based in whole or in part by his blog, as evinced by the lack of any advertising on it.

The man in question is [Louis Gray](#).

You might be wondering, as I have, why he has kept at his hobby of writing blog entries up to three times a day, *for at least a year* without any significant readership or an aspiration of monetary compensation in the technologies he was covering. The answer, as far as I can tell, is simple: He loves to write, and he writes about stuff that interests him. Fantasy football, TiVo, Apple stuff, iPods.. the list is diverse and changes over time.

Louis may have started his blog as a way to codify his thoughts on these subjects, but he was also ‘home schooling’ – in this I mean that all that writing was practice. Sure, hardly anyone saw his first 100 posts until well after they were posted. But when people *did* start to notice his blog, he had already taken his blogging game to a new level. Full opinion pieces on technology, new media, and corporate politics. In-depth statistical reports. Honest assessments of new technologies and software, as well as a number of exclusives.

No wonder people were drawn to his writing.

And Louis has become very popular, probably thanks in no small part to Robert Scoble ‘discovering’ him on [FriendFeed](#) and hyping him as only [Scobleizer](#) can do for a while. All that attention would go to anyone’s head, and they would probably parlay that fame into a better job, higher-profile gigs, etc. Louis, however, stayed modest. He decided to open his blog to other voices, other bloggers.

I should interrupt myself here and explain that, at least in social media circles, it’s fairly common to see ‘guest author’ posts on blogs. They are a good way to expose an established blog’s audience to a new voice, and afford a little cross-promotion. But here again, Louis never referred to his contributing bloggers as “guests,” he felt that they have a stake in the welfare of Louis’ blog as well.

For full disclosure, I am an author on Louis Gray’s team.

So Louis is a great guy. But why is his *writing* compelling? First, he has a very conversational tone. It’s easy to dive in to anything he’s written. He maintains a clear thread of thought through each piece, and he prefers to write from a perspective that isn’t just a re-hashing of the same news and memes that have been covered on other sites. Often, he will present a different opinion, or attempt to reconcile the logic made on different sides of the same issue. He is a mediator as much as he is a pundit.

Most of all, Louis hardly ever writes ‘from the hip,’ so to speak – you can be sure that if he is sitting down to write about something, he has given the matter a lot of consideration, and taking as much information as he has available to him (which usually is a lot more than I notice, I can tell you that!) and synthesized it into a thoughtful, comprehensive post.

Generally, it takes him about 20 minutes to write and less than an hour to post. Another benefit of all that practice.

I do envy him that.

Qwidget is loading...

Featuring: Qwidget

I'm all about trying out new social services, applications and tools. I love learning about a new product and getting around inside it to figure out its capabilities and features.

Perhaps recognizing that fact, Mike from Chat Ventures contacted me recently and offered to let me beta-test a new WordPress plugin they were developing called Qwidget.

What is Qwidget? It's simple. Think of it as a easy yes/no poll box that's been pumped full of social media goodness. On the surface, you will see a simple question, to which you can (without registration and hardly any thought) answer **yes** or **no**. Your answer is recorded.

Next, Qwidget offers you the chance to register (*in the widget*, it's free and quick, you don't even leave the site) and provide more details about why you chose your answer. Also, you will see other comments from other folks on the same question.

Notice that I did **not** say anything about the other folks having answered the question on this blog! In fact, Qwidget keeps a keyboard-based library of questions available for *all* Qwidget-enabled blogs to choose from. This means that blogs with the same sort of content (and resultingly, the same sort of *questions*) will be able to **pool** their discussions and answers via Qwidget.

Although still in beta, I think Qwidget has a ton of potential and I'm proud to be one of the early beta-testers of the service.

So, I will put my first poll question at the end of this post and I invite you to at least click **yes**, **no**, or **maybe**. If you are reading this article in your news reader, hop on over. My site doesn't have ads so you don't have to worry about making me 1/100th of a cent.

If you *really like* the way Qwidget works, and you run your own self-hosted WordPress blog, feel free to contact me at the information provided in my sidebar or visit the Qwidget 'get this' link and fill out the form expressing your interest in the beta.

Qwidget is loading...

I Am Blogger, Hear Me Rawr

Word.Line by apesara

A few days ago, I got an email. This email was from a fellow blogger that I was in the middle of a round of correspondence with. This particular email.. it made me realise something about blogging, and about writing.

All the bloggers I know would write whether they got paid for it or not. We have a love of writing persuasively, and journalistically, and passionately. We simply love the language. And that drive to write means we get a lot of practice becoming better at our craft.

OK, enough waxing poetic about the Muse. My point is this: We bloggers have power. And blog posts aren't the only place we can employ that power. That is what the email I mentioned taught me — as a writer, *we can choose to write well to audiences great and small.*

This may seem fairly obvious, but bear with me. You send and receive emails every day. But how often do you get a really well-written email, that really tells you someone sat down and spent a significant amount of effort crafting it, and then sending it *only to you?*

It doesn't happen that often to me. When I got an email like that recently, I felt, somehow, that I was in the presence of greatness. As if a president or statesman from a time gone past, a time when fine writing was valued as much for its art as it was for its utility, had set quill to paper and hashed out a missive just for me.

I suddenly realized that this is why the electronic newsletter is still alive, and still *great*, despite criticism. This is why writing a blog entry is important, no matter the size of your audience. And this is why taking time to write an email with the same effort and thought is equally as important.

I'm going to spend a week doing something a little different here on Scribkin. Although burdened with lack of preparation, I'm going to select someone each day or two whos writing has made a difference to me in the past year, and attempt to give you my perspective on that person, and why I follow their writing.

Disqus Enables FriendFeed Sync

I just saw a tweet from [@disqus](#) declaring that you can now pull/post [Disqus](#) comments with [FriendFeed](#)! Of course, I have immediately enabled it, and we will see how well it works.

The process to enable the integration is fairly simple (steps blatantly stolen from the [Disqus](#) blog post):

1. Visit [Account Services](#)
2. Click **Enabled**
3. Retrieve your [FriendFeed Remote Key](#) and fill in the blanks
4. Then, visit [The Administration Panel](#)
5. Choose **Your Site** from the drop-down
6. Click the **Settings** tab
7. Check **FriendFeed comments**

If you don't already have your blog in FriendFeed, add these additional steps:

1. Visit [The FriendFeed Services Page](#)
2. Click **Blog**
3. Add your **RSS feed**

If you want the full story with illustrated steps, I recommend checking out the [Disqus Blog](#) post.

Scribkin, With Delicious FF and Twitter Infusion

In the past week or two, I have been playing with a number of new toys that promise to tie the social networks [Twitter](#) and [FriendFeed](#) to my blog a little more tightly.

TweetSuite

First, there's [TweetSuite](#) by [Dan Zarrella](#). This is a err.. sweet little self-contained plugin that makes your [WordPress](#) blog aware of the Twitterverse. There are four main components that make up TweetSuite:

1. A **tweet this** button that can be floated in the upper-left or upper-right portion of a blog post. Very similar to a [Digg](#) button.
2. An area below the post that tracks tweets about the article and lists them, complete with the optional ability to include a **re-tweet** button next to them.

3. Four fun Twitter-related widgets that can be dropped in the sidebar: Most, Recent, Last, and Favorite Tweets.
4. Last but not least, TweetSuite will optionally update Twitter when a new entry is posted.

I am not so invested in Twitter that I can tell if TweetSuite is catching all the Twitter buzz surrounding my entries. It did detect one tweet on my last entry and a couple more on older posts.. but that's one of the reasons I'm writing this post! To see if it works.

FF2Disqus

Second, I am using a cloud-based app called FriendFeed-to-Disqus (or FF2Disqus). This little utility is by Carter Rabasa, the guy who wrote Twitter2FF, a handy utility for synchronizing your Twitter and FriendFeed friends. Anyway, this web app isn't a plugin, and in fact hooks in to FriendFeed and Disqus, so it isn't specifically bound to WordPress blogs at all!

What it does is monitor a service on FriendFeed (say the RSS feed for your blog) and utilizes the Disqus API to push any new comments on the relevant entry in FriendFeed to your blog entry. So in effect what this does is bring the comment activity back in to your blog.

There have been a rash about this utility and the value that it brings to blogs and FriendFeed. I have to admit that I share a few reservations about deploying it full-time on my blog. But I decided, I would jump in with both feet and see how everything turns out. Hopefully, everything will be great.

Final Note

I have disabled Glenn Slaven's excellent FriendFeed Comments plugin for the moment in order to avoid redundancy. But don't think I don't like it – far from it! If FF2Disqus doesn't work out I'm going straight back to using this plugin!

Changing It Up on Twitter & FriendFeed

As the new year starts, I am increasingly thinking of changing my follow habits that I have maintained since I first logged in on Twitter and FriendFeed.

Mutual Respect

My attitude was, mutual respect. You follow me, I follow you. I can learn from everyone. I still think it's a good attitude to have, and I wish it was the right one. But increasingly, especially on Twitter, I don't think it is.

I'm going to rant a bit here, just warning you.

For months, I have been using FriendFeed and Twitter actively. At the beginning, I followed anyone who looked interesting and didn't care about who followed me back. I maintained what I thought of as a fairly altruistic policy toward both services, just concerning myself with finding great people.

More recently, my active search for new great people has begun to taper. First, I found tools for both services that figure out who my 'mutual followers' are.. and I have to admit, they have shaken my original innocence.. people who I thought I had connected with weren't following me. I was disheartened.

I briefly thought of whining.. but that doesn't feel right to me. It's very difficult for me to impose myself on other people. That's why I can't effectively use services like Digg and Mixx.

Anyway, I maintained my mutual follow policy. On FriendFeed, I just try to keep myself ignorant of any gaming that happens. I follow those who follow me, and I hope they respect that. Twitter, though, is a different story. With the rise of tools like Twitterless and SocialToo, I can see exactly how much 'gaming' is going on.

Gaming

And Twitter gaming is seriously on the rise.

I could (and perhaps will) write a whole different post on how people are gaming Twitter. But the behavior that is really irritating me recently are these folks that follow a lot of Twitterers and then, 10 minutes to two days later, un-follow all of them in the hopes that a certain percentage follow them back.

Why do they do this? Because Twitter now has a follow ratio that prevents people from following X number more than they have followers. It seems fairly arbitrary and people now see it as a challenge to defeat.

It irritates me no end. I've taken to blocking the people who exhibit this behavior with me. For example, recently one dude ([TheBobBlog](#) on Twitter) had the balls to follow me, send a robot DM when I followed him back, ignore a *separate* DM that I sent him asking about tumbling his photos, and then un-following me the next day! **BLOCKED.**

Ultimately, I don't want to be reactionary with a new follow/discovery policy going forward. That's why I have taken a step back and started thinking about what I *really* want to do going forward.. and help me in more ways than just addressing the gaming going on.

Two Paths

The way I see it, there are two ways I could go. I can go all-inclusive: Open the floodgates and follow thousands of people on both services a la Robert Scoble and just filter out the stuff I find interesting on the back-end; Or I can go exclusive: Start hand-picking those people I find interesting, go in-depth with them and re-grow my social circle with care.

Either way, I would not actively try to influence who is following me. And I am aware that going to exclusive route can have some negative backlash if folks place a lot of emphasis on mutual follows.

However, I am starting to think it is worth the risk.

Why? A few reasons:

- I fear I am missing too much from folks I respect as well as new people I follow, due to the increased amount of noise.
- I am spending more and more time just trying to keep up with what is happening in FriendFeed, much less exploring what the folks on FriendFeed are doing on their own blogs and other services.
- I wonder if I am missing opportunities to connect more with great people, as the crowd I follow gets ever larger.
- I find myself getting frustrated just using the social media tools that I found so enjoyable a scant few months ago.

Taking A Risk

So, you might notice a change as I radically upset the balance of followers to following. And if that's the limit for you, I don't blame you. But I can promise I'm not 'holing up' and disconnecting – *just the opposite*. I won't be surprised if I end up following more people than I

am now.. but I will have arrived there with a different methodology, and hopefully with more to offer those following me.

SUP WordPress?

I came across a quick post from Benjamin Golub in his blog about SUP (no Wikipedia page yet, anyone want to write one?), a protocol developed by FriendFeed and described in their blog.

Benjamin created a small YouTube video showing how SUP works.

`</param></embed></object></div>";" alt="">`
Benjamin Golub demonstrates SUP

So naturally, I now have a bit of SUP-envy, since I run a WordPress blog and not *my own home made cloud-based blog platform* like Ben. Which means my next step was to perform a Google search for 'WordPress' and 'SUP'. To my great surprise, a small SUP plugin has already been written!

Enter WP SUP, a small plugin that does exactly what's necessary, which is to say add a bit of code to the RSS feed to make it SUP-enabled, and ping FriendFeed when the feed is updated.

Done and done. Thanks Derek van Vliet! Everybody go friend him immediately on FriendFeed. Thanks!

WP SUP home page

Update: Feedburner seems to be stripping the SUP information out of the RSS feed header. I'm looking in to it, along with Josh Haley and Benjamin Golub

MediaRSS? Indeed!

I installed the MediaRSS WordPress plugin today. Hopefully that will mean that the picture that I included will show up in FriendFeed and other places that support Media RSS extensions.

Media RSS extensions allow one to describe different types of media, such as embedded music and video clips, directly in an RSS stream. These extensions are technically optional, so traditional RSS parsers can safely ignore them.

The Mother of All Demos: 40 Years

I just noticed that yesterday was the *40-year* anniversary of Douglas Engelbart's historic 1968 Human Augmentation demo, affectionately titled "The Mother of All Demos."

</embed></div>";" alt="">

Only slowly has this demo, Douglas, and the Stanford Research Institute team (The Augmentation Research Center, or ARC) gotten the recognition they deserve for the groundbreaking work they did here. The system they developed was called NLS or "oN-Line System." Many of the concept developed for and presented here didn't even have names back in 1968:

- The computer mouse (only recently named) as a alternative input device.
- Chording keyboard technology, a keyboard where multiple buttons are pressed simultaneously to issue a single command.
- Hypertext, or the concept of endowing a word to be a link to more information *about* that word.
- Electronic collaboration, the ability to share information and meta-information with other people in the same electronic system.
- Multimedia conferencing, sharing both audio, video, and electronic information simultaneously.
- Teleconferencing, being able to conference people in from remote locations.
- Metatext, the ability to endow text or other userland objects with contextual information.
- Email. Do I even have to say any more here?

In certain ways, a lot of the concepts and technologies we enjoy today with our networked PCs not only were first realized in 1968, but were then immediately stuffed back into the closet *because* of the explosive and unforeseen growth of "personal computers" in the '70s an '80s. Because they were so popular, funding for large, expensive collaborative systems such as the one in this demo dried up.

Only after years of first standalone PC use, local area networks and finally the internet did these technologies come back to the fore.

So, after 40 years, I'd simply like to say: *Doug, you and the ARC team were right. You touched the obelisk and the rest of us ran away. Thank you.*

You can find more on Douglas Engelbart, ARC, The NLS demo and more at these links:

- [Stanford's 1968 Demo Page: "The Mouse Site"](#)
- [The Bootstrap Institute](#)
- [Invisible Revolution](#) – a documentary

Short URLs Equals Expanded Browsers?

If you have ever used [Twitter](#) (and who hasn't, these days), you already know about the service's famous 140-character limit. Similar to a cell phone text message, that's all you get before you hit 'send.' Of course, you could break your message up into multiple short messages but the real effects of this limitation are two-fold:

- It forces Twitter users to think of brief, hopefully elegant ways to transmit (or 'tweet') their thoughts.
- It forces creative solutions to common problems such as sending an accompanying web address (or [URL](#)) with a tweet.

I could probably add a few more points on how this limit also defines how conversations *happen* on Twitter but that would be a whole different post, which has probably been covered many times by now.

For the Shorties

Let's focus on the second point though. Almost immediately after Twitter started picking up steam, URL-shortening services that already existed (and many more specifically for Twitter) started gaining in popularity as well.

These services, such as [tinyurl.com](#), [is.gd](#), [tr.im](#), [bit.ly](#) and many more, all do basically the same thing. They take a standard uncompressed (and hopefully easy-to-read) URL and associate a new, coded, very short URL with it. They do this by acting as a 'redirect' between you clicking on a shortened link in Twitter and ending up on the destination page.

The Pros

The benefit is clear: more of those precious 140 characters is available for actual message, less is taken up by the web address. There are other benefits as well. Some of these services allow customization of the shortened url (using a key word for example), and others offer statistics on just who clicked on the shortened URL and when.

The Cons

The drawbacks are also clear. For one, you have no idea where a shortened URL goes before you click on it. This has given rise to hugely popular internet memes such as the RickRoll, which basically is a shortened URL pointing to this YouTube video but in a tweet or other location that doesn't indicate anything about where the link goes. Walla, click on the link and you get *rickroll'd*.

Efforts have been made to make the redirect process more transparent, such as adding a custom version of the shortened URL that sends you to the redirect service with a full-text link to click on.. but these hardly get used because people want instant gratification, not the requirement of clicking through to the actual page or waiting 5 seconds, etc.

Another somewhat haphazard solution so far has been browsers and other tools that 'expand' the short URLs back to their original targets in-line, or at least show the target in a pop-up. The problem has been these have been single-shot solutions for the most part, working for one particular service but not the others, and/or only working for certain sites, such as Twitter.

Prediction

So, I am predicting that we are going to see a more concerted effort in the form of a browser plug-in (say for Firefox? Fingers crossed) or maybe a whole new *browser* that handles these compressed URLs natively, perhaps expanding them inline or in a popup, no matter what site you are on or what service the URL was compressed with. In addition, publically available statistics could be gathered from the redirect page at the same time the uncompressed URL is harvested, transmitting that info back to the recipient as well.

I think there is a great need for such a tool, and so I am prognosticating that it is *already being developed*. Hopefully we'll see it soon.

Final Thought

On a final note, I'd just to think out loud, and wonder why Twitter doesn't improve their 140-character algorithm so that it does not add the characters inside a web URL and, while we are at it, any username mentioned in the tweet (preceded by an at-sign: @) or a hashtag

(preceded by a hash-sign: #). I mean, if you are only giving us 140 characters, why can't they all count toward message?

Tangent Post from Louis Gray: [BigTweet Sends Tweets from Any Web Page \(Up to 280 Characters\)](#)

Space Mountain

Ha! Got your attention! Sorry, but this article isn't about *the Space Mountain* at the Magic Kingdom (or any of the knockoff rides at other Disney parks) but about FriendFeed.

Wait.. *what?*

I'll break it down. **FriendFeed is a space mountain.**

To wit, *interacting* with FriendFeed is like interacting with a mountain in space, in that it takes an enormous amount of effort to get the mountain to do anything, but once you have it moving, it's not stopping anytime soon.

In metaphorical terms, that is what is required to really appreciate FriendFeed as an experience. To extend the metaphor further, we could say that the space mountain (or *asteroid*, perhaps) isn't frozen out in deep space. It's more like a solar comet, spinning about a trajectory closer than Mercury. This mountain is **active**. It is almost paradoxical that a place that is so overwhelmingly active can start out being fairly slow going for the noob.

So, keep this in mind. We can't all be Mona — don't give up if you aren't a FriendFeed hero overnight.* It's best to start putting in your effort steadily, in the form of following interesting people, commenting on entries, showing yourself through stuff you find online via the bookmarklet and feeds. But most of all, **interact**.

Comment and like. A lot. At first, you won't get a lot of response from anybody. But keep plugging away, and people will notice, and the discussion and interaction will start happening.

Consider this: Even the least liked people on FriendFeed are well known simply by dint of their diligent effort. Oh, they enjoy their status as underdogs, but the point is that even with many many people blocking them, they still generate conversation due to their notoriety.

So, buckle up, be patient, and enjoy your ride.

* Tamar Weinberg on FriendFeed follower activity level.

Be the First to Rate This...

Yesterday, I saw a breaking news [blog entry](#) relating to [Outbrain](#) and [Disqus](#). It's a very small update in the Outbrain widget that detects if Disqus is being used and asks if the person rating an article would like to leave a Disqus comment as well.

Although the integration isn't huge, it did catch my attention and I decided to install Outbrain on my blog. Outbrain is a plug-in content rating system that also provides recommendations automatically at the end of each article where it is installed. There is no special logins needed to rate an article, just click on the number of stars you think the article deserves and your rating is recorded.

The install was very quick and easy, with one odd hiccup. The hiccup came when I was instructed to paste in a unique activation code for my blog in to the plugin's control panel. After hitting the button to attempt activation, I eventually got a 'timeout' error. I tried the same steps several times with no joy.

Eventually, however, I noticed that my blog management page on the Outbrain web site apparently decided I was activated, and allowed the plugin to operate normally. It was all very mysterious and I never actually got the confirmation through the control panel as I should. But knock on wood, I am up and running.

As you can see in my screenshot, I rated my own article to see if the Disqus integration was working. However, it didn't ask me to leave a comment. (I subsequently figured out the 'comment' link only appears on the single post page, after the Disqus module loads.)

There are a number of great blogs that I follow that are now using the Outbrain plugin, such as [Louis Gray](#), [CenterNetworks](#), [WinExtra](#), [The Inquisitr](#), and [VentureBeat](#).

What I Have Been Up To

I just realized I haven't linked up a number of posts I've done on other sites in the past week or two. I should correct that.

But first, I have to embed what I now consider to be the most important live stream on the internet, my new obsession, and now called "the new [RickRoll](#)" by people on [FriendFeed](#). I present to you.. the [Shiba Inu Puppy Cam](#), now with live chat!

[Online video chat by Ustream](#)

I can't get enough of 'em.

Ok, back to the catching-up. Here are some articles I've written you might be interested in checking out:

Louis Gray

- Social Media Workflow on the iPhone – 10/23
- Google's Suggest And Search: Never Completely Private – 9/11

Google Tutor

- Google haunts you ... with energy saving advice! 10/21
- GeoEye-1: Google's Satellite – 10/14

And of course please peruse the articles on this site!

Oh yeah. Apparently, it's also my birthday.

At Last — Disqus Supports Pingbacks!

Tonight, I got a SMS message from Disqus on Twitter. The tweet was pretty succinct:

Disqus for WordPress 2.03 released.: This release includes trackback/pingback and pagination support as we.. <http://tinyurl.com/5z98kh>

That was enough for me! Disqus' lack of PingBack support in WordPress was really something that I missed, as you can probably tell from this article's title. So, without wasting another minute, I followed the link to the blog entry, and downloaded the new version of the plugin, 2.03.

And, I'm happy to report that it does indeed support trackback and pingback support! I've included a screenshot below.

Disqus TrackBacks

Thanks for your hard work, Disqus team!

Feedly – Delicious – Digg Synergy FTW

I noticed today while browsing my river on Feedly that it 'enhanced' one of my del.icio.us bookmarks with commentary from Digg on the same article. As far as I can tell, it did not find the Digg entry based on the URL, but rather on the title of the article. Very cool! Also, the list of other recent del.icio.us bookmarks in the column on the right.

You may have noticed that the URL in question is actually one from Diigo. I actually have my Diigo annotations being pushed to del.icio.us automatically. Also, not in this screenshot is a link to the original Digg article at the bottom of the comment thread.



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