

Annuity Issuers Embracing Social Media One Tweet At A Time

By Ben Pousty, Corporate Insight *Wed, Jun 9, 2010*

A growing number of annuity issuers are using creative approaches on Twitter to reach new audiences online.



In October, our column titled “Should Annuity Firms Care About Social Media” reviewed two recent customer-focused social media projects and debated the importance of annuity issuers establishing a social media presence going forward. In the end, we concluded that given the rising popularity of established social media networks like Facebook among older individuals, it was only a matter of time before annuity issuers became more visible on this medium.

Since then, numerous firms have established Facebook pages and some have even ventured onto LinkedIn. Interestingly, however, the social media network most popular among our firms of late has been Twitter. Four firms we cover—AXA Equitable, Fidelity, Nationwide and TIAA-CREF—created Twitter accounts in the last seven months and have been actively Tweeting since.

Fidelity and TIAA-CREF were the first two firms on Twitter, joining in late October 2009 followed by Nationwide in February. AXA Equitable posted its first Tweet this May. The Twitter pages are similar in that they serve primarily to promote the firm’s brand and actively interact with followers. However, the tone and approach the firms use to communicate this information vary greatly.

Although they are newest to Twitter, AXA Equitable has been the most visible and innovative firm thus far. A large promotional image on the AXA public homepage featuring the firm’s signature 800 lb. Gorilla mascot announces the firm’s arrival on Twitter and links to the firm’s profile page. Of the four annuity providers to recently engage Twitter, AXA Equitable is the only one that has publicly advertised its Twitter page with focused promotional imagery.



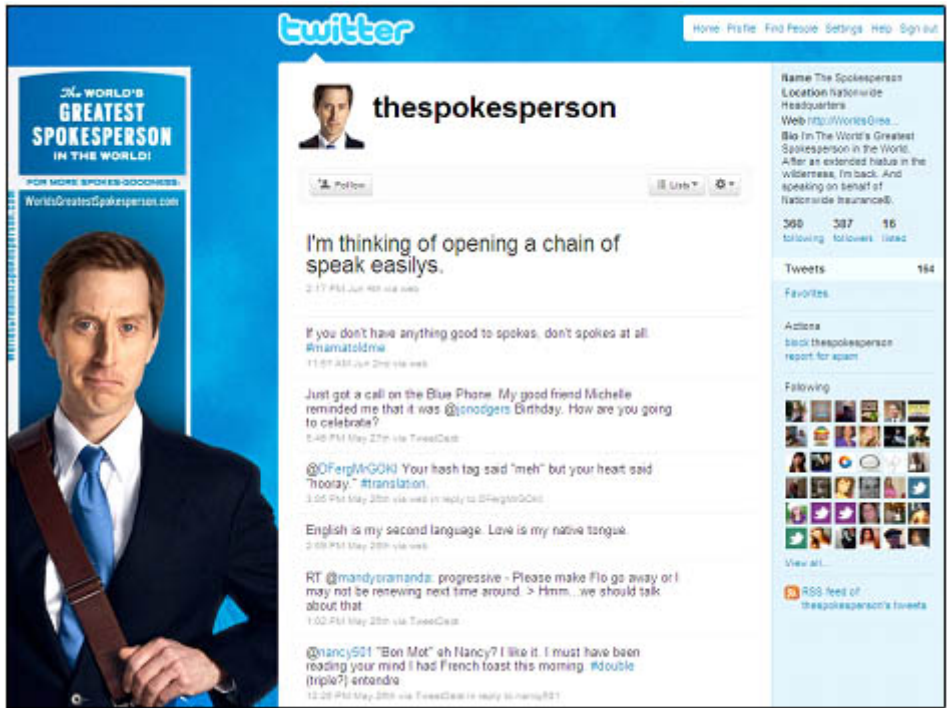
AXA Equitable Public Homepage Twitter Promotion

The 800lb. Gorilla serves as the face and voice of AXA’s Twitter page. The Gorilla’s Tweets cover the firm’s investment products, retirement solutions and online resources. AXA is also the lone firm to currently offer audio tweets, posts that link to short audio messages from the Gorilla himself.



AXA Equitable Twitter Page

Nationwide also uses a character for its Twitter page—The World’s Great Spokesperson in the World. A promotional image on the public homepage links to the Spokesperson’s Twitter, Facebook and YouTube pages. Nationwide clearly takes the most light-hearted approach among the firms, posting funny, off-beat commentary befitting of the cocksure Spokesperson’s character. Interestingly, the Tweets do not directly promote any of the firm’s products or services. Rather, they serve primarily to solidify the connection between the firm and Spokesperson marketing campaign.



Nationwide Twitter Page

Fidelity and TIAA-CREF use more straightforward tones on their Twitter pages. Tweets are almost entirely about the firms' products, services and online content while all commentary focuses on retirement or investment topics or company news.

Surprisingly, there presently seems to be little correlation between entertainment value and popularity. As of this writing, Fidelity has the most followers on Twitter, with over 2,600, followed by TIAA-CREF at roughly 1,100. AXA Equitable has picked up over 300 followers since joining Twitter in May; Nationwide remains under 400 followers.

Rather, it seems a number of other factors influence the number of followers a firm acquires—usefulness of information, promotion on the firm's site itself and frequency of updates are all factors that can affect a firm's popularity on Twitter.



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