

NAAC | CORNER

WHAT IS IT? TWITTER

Over the past few months, I am relatively sure that every time you have signed onto the internet, you have seen or found something new — some form of technology that you've never seen before — or something that makes you feel like you're already behind the times. I look at the internet sometimes and wonder how to keep up with every bylaw, interpretation, coach and student-athlete when each one challenges me every day with questions. New technology only seems to complicate each question and answer. Enter another new phase of technology — Twitter. It's another new way that coaches can “speak” to recruits and plenty of our staff are beginning to take advantage of it.



Jessica Reo



What is Twitter? According to their Web site, “Twitter is a service for friends, family and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?”

That simple question has caused, or is about to cause, heartburn for many compliance officials around the country. And those compliance officials, who are in blissful ignorance, will be reaching for the Tums once they read this or get to know what Twitter is about. If you log on to NAAC Connections, you will already find an active discussion about how different conferences and the NCAA are currently interpreting Twitter and what it means to recruits and coaches. I approached one of my coaches about it and he indicated that he's working on Skype and another form of communication to get in touch with international prospects.

Twitter offers a few different services — direct-message Tweeting, eTweeting and Twitter texts. ETweets and Twitter texts are general in nature and everyone who signs up will receive notifications throughout the day to their e-mail and/or to their cell phone. The information is supposed to be “planned spontaneity” by the users. Users update or post when they want and post whatever information they feel like posting. Spelling is optional and information is not exceptional. It's like having a conversation with someone that you pass in the hall — short bursts of information. And according to the Web site, “With Twitter, you can stay hyper-connected to your friends and always know what they're doing. Or, you can stop following them any time. You can even set quiet times on Twitter so you're not interrupted. Twitter

puts you in control and becomes a modern antidote to information overload.” Doesn't that make you feel comfortable as someone who works in compliance?

An article about Twitter has already made it to the *New York Times* — published on January 5, 2009. That's how much of an impact this new form of communication has already made. It's becoming a fast-growing connector of people.

Professional athletes are beginning to log on and use Twitter to garner immediate fan support and make fans feel important and valued. Some are promoting appearances, getting information out about upcoming athletics events that are not well publicized within a local area, and some are using the information to request feedback on anything from designs on apparel to music choices. So what does all of this mean to compliance officers/officials throughout the country? It means that there is another place to look for interaction between coaches and recruits. It means that this is something else that we have to review regularly to see what our coaches can or cannot do with this form of communication. Janet Oberle, the assistant director of athletics for compliance and student services and SWA at St. Louis University, recently posed the question to the NCAA Membership Services (AMA).

The response that she received and posted on NAAC Connections was telling — in her words, “In essence, they are viewing twittering as not being direct contact between a coach and a prospect. Specifically, they are viewing these activities as akin to e-mails on a Facebook account. Therefore, prospects of all ages can sign up to receive both eTweets and Twitter texts from coaches.” There are warnings about the direct-message Tweeting, but who will be responsible for tracking this information and communication? We will.

As you, your colleagues and I make our way through this compliance maze of bylaws, interpretations, rationale, coaches, student-athletes and administrators who push us to the limits every day, take some time to do a little research on this Web site and new communication tool. Keep up with technology, check the internet often. You may be surprised to find that it isn't as bad as we might think, but I don't know if it's as good as we think either!

Thanks for this article to Jessica Reo, senior associate athletics director for student services at the University of Central Florida.



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