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**POV: BEYOND 140: HOW TWITTER'S 10K-
CHARACTER LIMIT COULD CHANGE THE
GAME FOR PHARMA**

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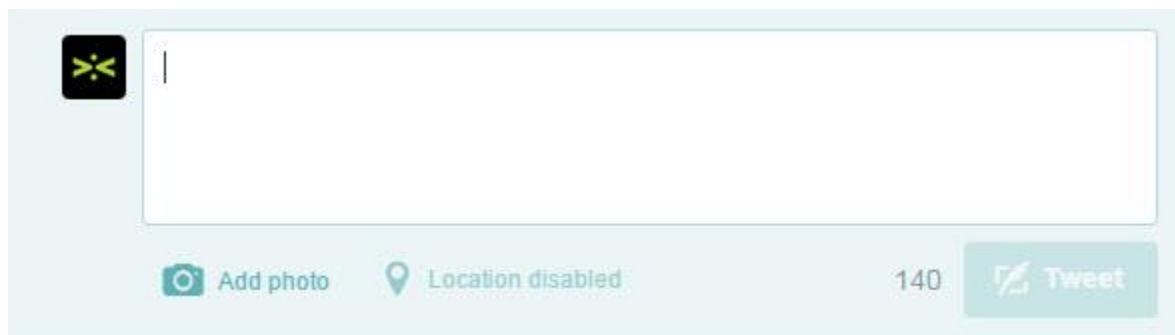
BEYOND 140: HOW TWITTER'S 10K-CHARACTER LIMIT COULD CHANGE THE GAME FOR PHARMA

ADDENDUM

On March 18, 2016, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said Twitter's character limit would remain at 140. We'll be keeping our eye on future developments on that platform and how they might affect pharma marketers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the past several years, Twitter has been slowly introducing features that allow users to circumvent its standard 140-character restriction. [Twitter Cards](#), 10,000-character direct messages and [Quote Tweets](#) all expanded the amount of characters each message displays. In early January, reports surfaced indicating that users will soon have more control over their tweets than ever before with a 10,000-character limit, or almost 100 times the current amount allowed.



Twitter has typically been a difficult platform for pharma to leverage, due to its character limits and space restrictions for fair balance and important safety information (ISI). The FDA recognized this barrier for pharma marketers and provided draft guidance around engaging on the platform in 2014. An increased character count may allow more freedom for pharma to utilize the platform.

This move, dubbed "Beyond 140," may become a reality by as early as this March. It will be Twitter's biggest update in years. This POV will highlight some of the benefits and considerations

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for pharma marketers and will offer recommendations for making Twitter a part of their 2016 marketing plan.

BACKGROUND

Twitter was never intended to have a 140-character restriction. [As Jack Dorsey pointed out in his response to critics](#) of the proposed change, 140 characters was a limit necessitated by the 160-character SMS restriction when Twitter launched in 2006. First and foremost, Twitter is a media platform with roots as a messaging platform.

Beyond 140 will reportedly allow the first 140 characters to be seen in a Twitter feed as they are in the current format, but it will include an “Expand” option for messages longer than 140 characters. This means the user experience for Twitter purists does not have to drastically change, even as new doors are opened for marketers.

BENEFITS OF BEYOND 140 FOR PHARMA

The increase to 10,000 characters creates exciting new options for the production and consumption of content. But does it make Twitter a dramatically more viable platform for those operating in a regulated environment? Let's take a look.

- 1. Users will spend more time on tweets.** An increase to 10,000 characters means brands can finally host deeper content on Twitter without necessarily driving users to an owned site. In the world of 140 characters, users have short attention spans: reading a quick tweet, deciding whether or not to engage with the content, and spending only a few seconds looking at it at best. Marketers leveraging this new feature to host long-form content gives users the ability to engage with the brand longer, increasing time on site/time on tweet. This results in an opportunity to provide more information, education and content to users.
- 2. Search will receive a big boost.** In the past, users who wanted to post more than 140 characters needed to use a workaround. The two most popular methods were uploading an image with as much text as necessary and including a link to a third-party site with the remainder of the message. Neither workaround allowed Twitter to index the text beyond 140 characters, so these workaround tweets were not surfaced in Twitter search results. This

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update will allow more meaningful messages to surface since the complete 10,000-character tweet will be indexed. Brands leveraging this new feature may also see a boost on Google since the search engine also indexes tweets.

3. More hashtags mean better targeting.

Hashtags allow brands to annotate their tweet with relevant keywords. These tags are searchable and aggregate similar content for users. Beyond 140 provides the opportunity for marketers to include more of these relevant tags in their tweets. With Twitter's current limits, brands are able to share a message, a link to their website, and two or three hashtags. With the advent of Beyond 140, marketers attending a conference will be able to include the appropriate conference hashtags along with individual message tags, something Instagram users already take advantage of.

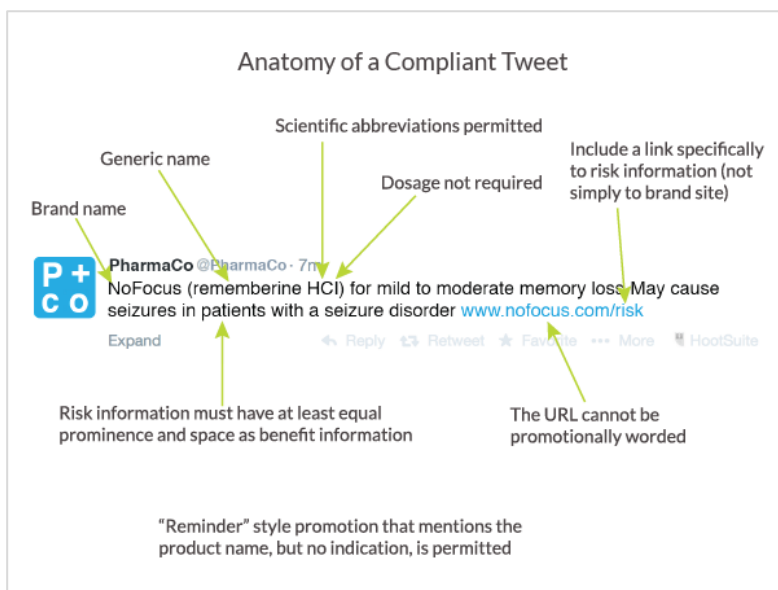


As a best practice, marketers should be sure to avoid spamming tweets with too many irrelevant hashtags. Twitter will likely release more information upon rollout about ways it plans to combat abuse of hashtags and @mention features.

4. Above all, there is more real estate for fair balance. Twitter has rarely been the platform of choice for pharma marketers due to the restrictions the 140-character limit has imposed on their messaging. 140 characters do not allow room for fair balance or ISI, and the FDA's draft guidance on character-constrained messaging only allowed for messages that provided a less than optimal user experience.

Some of the ways pharma brands tried to engage on Twitter in the

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past were not FDA-compliant. Important safety information displayed as a background image often didn't display at all within popular platforms and devices, and it was never shown on mobile devices. Marketers need to be aware that the first 140 characters "above the fold" still need to be [compliant](#).

RECOMMENDATION

The Beyond 140 update means Twitter will provide an opportunity for many brands to expand interactions with audiences while remaining compliant in a regulated space. And as long-form content [once again](#) takes center stage (consider the popularity of sites like [Medium](#)), users may be more receptive to longer tweets.

The additional space may be particularly beneficial for disease awareness or "lightly branded" assets with a branded component. Many Facebook pages use a similar unbranded approach, implementing a custom tab like [Pharmawall](#), where branded conversations can take place next to ISI. A compliant message with a call to action to expand the tweet is similar to a compliant message with a call to action to visit a Facebook page's tab. "Click Expand to learn more about a treatment for MS," with full product promotion and fair balance in the other 9,860 characters would mirror many of the compliant practices used today. Brand name and indication would never be seen without full ISI in this format.

One of the reasons for considering this approach is that it allows users to engage more fully with the brand messages, with less commitment. Expanding a tweet to read more without leaving the platform for another destination will take less effort, meaning users will be more likely to do so. Brands will need to consider how to respond to branded questions on Twitter, since responses will also need to remain compliant within the context of the channel.

While this increase does not automatically mean every pharma brand should be on Twitter, many brands may now be able to participate in a space that's historically been hostile for the industry.

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