

The Times

TCNJ welcomes the big tweet

BY MATT FAIR
STAFF WRITER

EWING - Jack Dorsey, the CEO and co-founder of the social networking website Twitter, needed slightly more than 140 characters to get through his remarks to a large crowd at the College of New Jersey's Kendall Hall last night.

But despite defying Twitter's M.O. in his speech, Dorsey sought to explain that the guiding principles that the Internet phenomenon grew out of have applications all across society.

In creating the networking website, which allows users to post 140-character status updates that have come to be known as "tweets," Dorsey said he held firm to the ideas of immediacy, ease-of-use and transparency.

"There are companies (in certain sectors) that are in dire need of these concepts," Dorsey said. "They are, primarily, (in) health care and finance."

Dorsey Said users' ability to respond immediately to their friends about anything happening around them at any particular moment, via either their computer or their cell phone, would help facilitate a greater dialogue between citizens, in addition to helping friends stay updated on what their friends are doing on a minute-by-minute basis.

"When my mom in St. Louis tweets about taking her dog for a walk, for the fifth time today, I like seeing it in real time," he said.

While Twitter does not release information related to the demographics of its users, or even how many accounts it maintains, a third-party analysis of traffic on the site shows that it brings in 6 million unique visitors monthly.

He said what has help fuel Twitter's popularity is the simplicity of its interface, which allows users to spend more time thinking about what to use the site for rather than how to use it to begin with.

"I don't have to think about the technology," Dorsey said. "It stays out of my way and I can just use it."

Twitter is also credited with helping to fuel the wave of protest and civil disobedience that followed the disputed presidential elections in Iran earlier this year, when, it is believed, vote-rigging led to the re-election of incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Since its launch in Oakland, Calif., in 2006, Twitter has become very popular with celebrities, media figures and politicians. Everyone from Sen. John McCain, CNN anchor Larry King and actor Christopher Walken have accounts on the site.

Dorsey said he was particularly impressed by an incident that occurred while he watched President Barack Obama's first address to Congress earlier this year, when he saw Sen. Claire McCaskill typing on her cell phone during the speech. Moments later, as a follower of McCaskill's Twitter account, he got a message from her on his own cell phone.

"What I'm seeing on the screen is vibrating in my pocket," Dorsey said. "I've never felt closer to my government."

But he also added that, after initially thinking the site would be popular with teenagers, he was surprised to see how much it has taken off with older people as well.

He said the technology allows user to have a level of unprecedented access to government officials and other public personalities that they normally see only on the filter of TV or media.

"It makes them so human," he said. "We put these people up on pedestals, but now we get to see that they are really just like us."

Of course, the technology does have its downside. A football player on the Kansas City Chiefs was recently suspended for one game after inappropriate comments he posted on his Twitter account.

"We have devices that can interrupt us at any point during the day," Dorsey said. "That's very unhealthy, and it's something that we need to figure out."

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