

Mad Men on Twitter: drama in 140 characters

The story of @PeggyOlson and the rest of the *Mad Men* on Twitter is fraught with as many plot twists, mysterious characters and questionable motives as a well-crafted drama. It was written by fans who helped shape it every day with their passion for the story *and* the medium. For many (certainly for me), the medium was even more important than the message.

The saga began on Monday, August 18, 2008. I was tweeting from my personal account, @CarriBugbec, when something in the Twitterstream caught my eye: “@Don_Draper is on Twitter.” It was like a slap upside the head. I was a big fan of the show, I was a marketer, and I was already managing multiple Twitter accounts. The idea of tweeting for TV characters seemed like such a great marketing idea, my initial reaction was “Wow....why didn’t I think of that?!”

I immediately clicked through to see what @Don_Draper was up to. He was tweeting in character to @Joan_Holloway, but not to any other *Mad Men* characters. I crossed my fingers (figuratively since they were flying across the keyboard) and raced to check if anyone had nabbed Peggy Olson as a character on Twitter. My heart was literally pounding the way it does when you’re dialing into a radio contest and you desperately want to be the first to get through. I felt like I had “won” when I discovered the account name of @PeggyOlson was available and I grabbed it before anyone else could.

I began tweeting to Don and Joan right away. To my delight, they tweeted back! I initially thought tweeting for Peggy would just be a fun way to role-play my favorite *Mad Men* character. I figured I’d tweet at my friends for a couple of weeks, we’d have a good laugh and interest would fall off. However, from almost the first tweet, I realized many people thought the characters were part of an actual marketing campaign for the show.

Love how AMC integrated Mad Men into Twitter - taking a character beyond the tube. — @tjeffrey

'Mad Men' characters on Twitter take us right into the show - http://tinyurl.com/6ykt3r — @mediaphyter

Would love to meet the clever PR agent behind the Mad Men tweets... ;) — @SarahJaneMorris

I don't know what's up with all these Mad Men Twitter handles...but I sure am excited to see what they have to say. — @susqhb

I am loving the Mad Men Characters twittering. So fun. — @stephaniemar

As soon as I discovered this, I deleted my first few tweets from Peggy (which were a bit on the snarky side) and dedicated myself to making Peggy’s Twitter persona accurately reflect her on-screen persona. I got an immediate charge out of entertaining Peggy’s fans. It was a little like being on stage. I already had a real-life alter-ego as a professional singer (with an acting background), so this was definitely up my alley.

As a marketing pro, I recognized that this little experiment could provide a great case study about creative ways to use Twitter for marketing and this actually became my primary motivation going forward. I started treating @PeggyOlson like a real job—to the extent this was possible while not having any interaction with AMC.

Proof point: Twitter can sell *and* entertain

Peggy picked up nearly 200 followers that first evening, which shocked and delighted me. Gaining 200 followers in a few hours may not seem like much now—celebrities can add thousands of followers a day. In August 2008, however, there were no celebrities on Twitter, so this was quite unusual.

The *Mad Men* characters on Twitter became big news over the next few days. Identities for nearly all the Sterling Cooper characters (those who worked at the ad agency on the show) were created within the next 48 hours. Marketers and fans of the show were gushing about this “genius” campaign and speculating about who was behind it.

Each time someone raved about the so-called “campaign” it gave me a little thrill. It also convinced me to stay anonymous. I hadn’t initially planned to go incognito, but once I saw that people enjoyed analyzing the tweets and speculating, I wanted to keep it a mystery. Plus, most people thought the *Mad Men* tweets were quite authentic. Some even thought we were tweeting hints about where the story arcs were headed. I was worried that fans wouldn’t be as engaged if they knew the tweeters had nothing to do with the show.

I also tried to meet the people behind the other *Mad Men* characters on Twitter. The reason for this was two-fold. I wanted to convince them to stay anonymous so we could keep the ruse going for as long as possible. I also wanted to find out if anyone



from AMC (or its agencies) was participating. Once the mad tweeting had taken off, it occurred to me that someone official may have jumped in to manage the effort surreptitiously. If I had been in their place, I would have done that just to protect the brand.

To protect my identity, I approached the other characters with caution, starting with @Don_Draper and @Joan_Holloway. Joan played coy. She didn't want to coordinate or reveal her identity—and she never did. Don and Peggy, however, began exchanging direct messages (DMs) in character, then quickly dropped the façade and started messaging each other out of character. Yet, we still didn't share our true identities right away. I met the people behind most of the other Sterling Cooper characters, however. @Sal_Romano, @Paul_Kinsey and @Bertram_Cooper all launched within 48 hours after I started @PeggyOlson and were happy to connect personally.

One thing was clear: we all got a kick out of the interaction and the publicity—even though we were anonymous. It inspired us to increase our followers and continue engaging authentically with fans of the show. While it was big fun, it was also *very* time-consuming. I put in about 50 hours during the first eight days I was on the “job.”

Brandjacking or fan fiction?

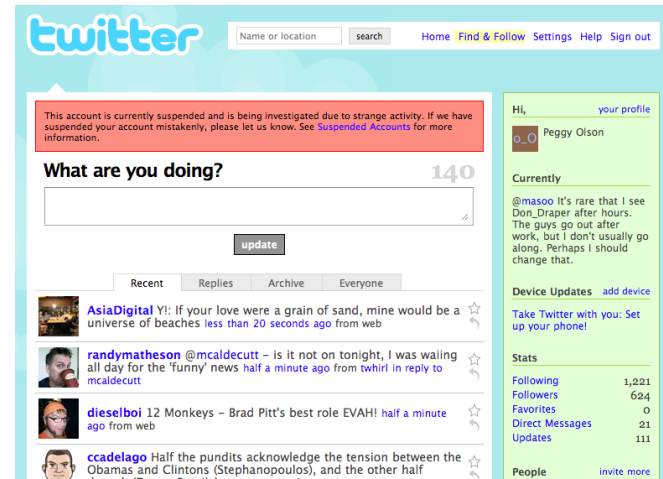
On the evening of August 25 (just a week after I started @PeggyOlson) I was busy following people who were talking about *Mad Men* on Twitter when my account froze. I hit *home* to refresh my page and was horrified to see that my account had been suspended for “strange activity.”

I frantically started searching through Twitter's terms of service to see if I had accidentally violated any rules. A few minutes later, I got a vague email from Twitter with the ominous subject heading: “Trademark Infringement.” My heart leaped into my throat.

In just a week's time, I had already invested a lot of time and energy into @PeggyOlson and I'd become quite attached to her. I loved the role-play. I liked the challenge of writing in Peggy's voice. I was competitive about increasing her followers. I definitely wanted to beat @Don_Draper, who had a six-day head start. I was especially giddy about all the marketing bloggers (there were new posts going up every day) saying this was the new way to do marketing because that was exactly what I wanted to prove with this experiment.

After getting the email from Twitter, I swallowed hard and started scanning all the other *Mad Men* tweeters to see if their profiles had been taken down. I was surprised to learn that only @Don_Draper, @Joan_Holloway and @PeggyOlson had been suspended.

Until that point, it had never even occurred to me that what we were doing could be construed as trademark infringement or brandjacking. Using fake names and avatars—even celebrity names—on Twitter and other social media platforms was quite common. I was stunned that Twitter had targeted us. But that was the first in a series of twists and turns on a crazy roller coaster ride that provided a fast-track education about crisis communications, fan fiction, entertainment marketing and savvy brand management.



When a character falls on Twitter, everybody hears it

Just moments after @Don_Draper, @Joan_Holloway and @PeggyOlson were suspended, the Twitterverse (the universe of people on Twitter) erupted with curiosity, helpful information and snarky commentary.

**... and one by one, @don_draper, @peggyolson, @joan_holloway...
suspended and gone.
— @neilkleid**

**Hmmm... the @peggyolson and @don_draper Twitter accounts were
suspended for suspicious activity. — @kessler**

Whoa, was @don_draper not an officially sanctioned account? Whoever it was knew what was going to happen in the newest episode. Epic sad — @cinevegas

If @don_draper didn't exhibit suspicious activity, none of us would actually watch Mad Men. — @Armano

I was riveted by the tweetstream for the next few hours as the story picked up steam. In fact, this is how I found out *why* @PeggyOlson and the other *Mad Men* tweeters had been suspended.

Update: Twitter blacklisted the Mad Men characters due to a DMCA takedown notice <http://is.gd/1UYy> — @parislemon

VentureBeat (now SocialBeat) managed to contact Biz Stone (co-founder of Twitter) late on a Monday night to determine that AMC had sent a DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act) take-down notice to Twitter. My first thought was “Arrgggh! I’m going to get sued by a network!” I immediately composed an email to a lawyer friend who specializes in intellectual property and trademark issues.

I was also indignant. We were doing a great job promoting AMC’s program for *free*. We were respectful of the show and true to the characters. I thought if AMC actually cared about their characters conversing on Twitter, they would have initiated the tweeting themselves. Moreover, if they wanted to know what the *Mad Men* tweeters were up to, all they had to do was ask us.

Since my indignation was stronger than my fear, I decided to pull something out of my back pocket: @Peggy_Olson. I had reserved several versions of Peggy’s name when I initially created her account and I decided that I wasn’t going down without a tweet!



This is the only thing I ever wrote for Peggy that was somewhat out of character. It ended up being widely quoted.

People immediately started following the new Peggy and furiously tweeting about the take-down. I was up until 4:00 am that night just following the comments in the

Twitterstream. I couldn’t sleep anyway. I was worried I was going to get shot down by a posse of Hollywood attorneys.

When I woke up a few hours later, the story had spread like wildfire. East coast tweeters and marketing bloggers had caught wind of what happened. Most were outraged that their Twitter friends from 1961 had been taken away from them.

Oh AMC TV...how could you be so dumb. Everybody loved the Mad Men Tweeters, regardless of whether or not they were real. — @jpgardner

Goodbye Mad Men on Twitter? <http://twurl.nl/p8of0o> Bad move on AMC's part in my opinion. — @stevehall

Looks like Mad Men was Twitterjacked. And AMC doesn't like it. I hope you staff up the accounts, AMC. <http://snurl.com/3jydk> — @ScottMonty

V. bummed that Twitter suspended @peggyolson, esp. since she was more interesting than a lot of "real" Twitterers. — @jonnodotcom

Let the Mad Men Tweet!!!! — @adtothebone

(Mad Men) - hopefully AMC will resurrect the Twitter accts now that they've "retrieved" the usernames. If not it's a huge opportunity lost. — @uniquevisitor

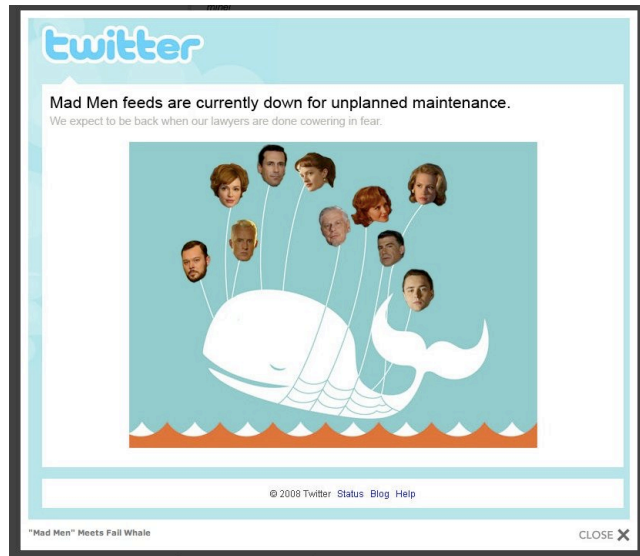
@pdxmama twitter is removing Mad Men tweets?? No!!! I love being tweeted by fictional characters! — @pdxlilly

A number of bloggers offered more detailed perspectives on the take-down. Most lambasted AMC, often with funny headlines and graphics. I appreciated the levity, even though I was still scared about getting sued.

By midday, the *Hollywood Reporter* wrote about it. Then *Reuters* picked it up, and it was international news. I was stunned, to say the least. Reporters from major news organizations were reaching out to @Peggy_Olson (my back-up character) and the other *Mad Men* characters who were still functioning. Everyone wanted to suss out the identities of the fan-fiction outlaws.

I was busy on the back channel (emails and direct messages) with other *Mad Men* tweeters, trying to convince them not to reveal themselves and not to give up on the grand experiment. This was no small feat.

The idea of an interview with a major news organization was appealing for them, especially since it seemed that our time as *Mad Men* tweeters was over anyway. However, as a PR gal, I sensed that the story would be a flash in the pan because we had just gotten started. Some of the characters had only been tweeting for a day or two. It was definitely too early to glean any marketing insights for a white paper (which is what I had hoped for).



One of my favorite images from the *Mad Men* twitter take-down. Alas, I never knew who created it.

Unfortunately, the person behind the @Paul_Kinsey character was especially worried that AMC's lawyers would come knocking. In an effort to mitigate legal problems, he wrote about his identity—and revealed that we were all just random contributors—in a blog post (no longer online) the morning after the take-down. I understood why he did it, but I was still crushed. I felt like he'd given people the answer to the mystery while we were still in the middle of the story.

By now, the drama of the tweeters had become just as riveting as anything that had ever happened on the small screen in *Mad Men*. A big corporation had us running scared, people were scurrying to take cover, our loosely assembled team could not agree on a course of action, some participants were jockeying for control, reporters were chasing us down, we already had a press leak, there was rampant speculation by on-lookers, and I was extremely worried about people discovering my real identity. Sounds like a *Mad Men* character we know, right?. Yet, all I could do at this point was read fan tweets and write cryptic messages (in character) as @Peggy_Olson.

@dabitch Thanks for the advice. Unfortunately, I don't seem entirely in control of my own career.

— @Peggy_Olson

Pleased to discover it's not hard to make friends in advertising after all. But the guys in legal are humorless, and frankly not too bright. — @Peggy_Olson

@CatWeaver There is a lot of confusion in the office today. Nobody at Sterling Cooper seems to know what's going on. Mr. Draper isn't here. — @Peggy_Olson

Suddenly, at 3:15 pm the day after our profiles were taken down, our accounts went back up. I got an email from Twitter saying AMC asked them to restore the accounts and requested that the *Mad Men* Tweeters (at least the three of us who had been suspended) contact AMC's digital agency Deep Focus. I immediately started tweeting as @PeggyOlson again.

@saleandro After a long, exhausting day in meetings, I'm finally free. — @PeggyOlson

@bryanfuhr I've chatted with @Don_Draper, but he's got a lot to handle at the moment. He'll be back in the office very soon. — @PeggyOlson

I don't think I've spent so much time in meetings as I have in the past two days. I just want to do my job. I'm glad to be back at my desk. — @PeggyOlson

I felt a little uneasy about reaching out to the folks at Deep Focus, but after thinking about it for 24 hours, I was more curious than cautious. I dialed in as "Peggy" and eventually told them who I was. Since I was a marketer and was primarily interested in @PeggyOlson as a case study, they were eventually convinced that I wasn't going to do anything to damage the AMC brand.

Later that evening, I had a phone call with the creator of @Don_Draper. We finally revealed our identities and had a long conversation. He felt much the same way I did: that this was a great marketing experiment. That's why he created @Don_Draper in the first place. It was the first of several phone calls over the next few weeks in which we discussed plot lines, character motivations, marketing, social media and the *Mad Men* tweeter backchannel.

The Mad Men Twitterverse expands in whimsical ways

Ironically, the DMCA take-down provided a tremendous amount of publicity for the *Mad Men* tweeters and actually encouraged many more would-be *Mad Men* to join our cavalcade. Over the next 10 days, at least 150 news and blog articles were written about the fan-fiction drama. It was covered by the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the U.K. Guardian, BusinessWeek and publications in at least five other countries, including Brazil and Germany.

Every available character name from *Mad Men* was snapped up on Twitter, including the remaining office characters, peripheral characters, people from Don Draper's home and neighborhood, even inanimate objects! @Dick_Whitman and @Betty_Draper showed up the day of the take-down, with a second @BettyDraper (accompanied by neighborhood gossip @Francine_Hanson) arriving the next day. @Harry_Crane, @Ken_Cosgrove, @Sally_Draper and many more came on board later in the week. @Jimmy_Barrett was particularly brilliant. He nailed the obnoxious humor of the second-string rat-pack comedian on the show. His cheating wife, @Bobbie_Barrett, was true to form as well.

Over the next few weeks, anytime a new character appeared on the TV program, that character would show up on Twitter the next day. Even the new-fangled copy machine that was installed at Sterling Cooper got a Twitter account: @Xeorox914 (one of my personal favorites).

Just as interesting, a lot of fictional accounts were created specifically to interact with *Mad Men* characters, though they weren't *Mad Men* themselves. The first was @FrankAdman, who joined right after @Don_Draper and was clearly a send-up of the Sterling Cooper era of ad guys. Mailroom boy, @Bud_Melman, joined us the day before the take-down. He was very helpful in delivering "inter-office memos" while Don, Joan and Peggy were indisposed. @HullabalooGirl was a 60's-era jet-setting fashion model who encouraged @PeggyOlson to break out of her conservative rut.

Then there were characters based on real people of the era. @David_Ogilvy, @Frank_OHara, @Dick_Nixon, @BarryGoldwater and others jumped into the fray to engage *Mad Men* tweeters in relevant conversations about ideas and events of the early 1960s.

Later, a crop of commentators arrived on the scene. I think of them as the tweet tabloids. Those included @OnMadMen and @MadMenTalking. Those accounts are now silent, but new tweeters popped up to take their place: @MadMenTweets, @MadMenFodder and @MadMenWiki.

What's most fascinating to me is that the people behind every one of these characters stayed anonymous for months. Most of them are still are. The tweeter behind @Don_Draper revealed his identity a few weeks after season two was over (then went dark until season three when he passed his character on to somebody else), but the rest of us stayed the (incognito) course.

A few other characters went dark in the first month or two and new versions of those characters popped up to take their places. Some of the new characters were even better than the originals. In 2009, @_DonDraper surpassed anything @Don_Draper had done, in both writing and followers. @PeteCampbell, @BertramCooper and @HarryCrane have long since superseded their originals as well.

In some cases, the original tweeters just didn't want to put in the time it takes to do it well, so they handed their characters over to me. Yes, I tweet for multiple *Mad Men*—new and old! Those other characters shall remain a secret for the time being.

Engaging the passion of @PeggyOlson's fans

In December 2009, a startup in New York City had a small idea that blew up almost overnight into an impressive, star-studded event dubbed "The Oscars of Twitter." Of course, I'm talking about *The Shorty Awards*.

Sawhorse Media launched the Shorty Awards thinking it might be nothing more than a few dozen people toasting their favorite tweeters in a bar. Yet, thousands of people participated and 26 winners were named. True to the spontaneous nature of Twitter, people were allowed to make up their own categories and voters were required to tweet unique reasons why their favorite tweeters deserved to win. This encouraged great content as people got creative with categories and nominations.

@PeggyOlson was nominated in the advertising category. I was surprised by all the spontaneous, unsolicited votes that she got initially. However, campaigning for votes became highly competitive very quickly and I realized I was at a huge disadvantage. Individuals and brand tweeters who were competing for votes were able to post campaign tweets, send out emails, put badges on their websites, call their friends, wrote code to auto-populate tweets for voting, get their employees to help—you name it.

I was still clandestine, so I couldn't use *any* marketing tools besides Twitter. I couldn't even ask my friends to vote, since most of them didn't know about Peggy! Plus, I had to stay in character as a copywriter from 1962 while campaigning. What I did have on my side, however, was a community (that I'd worked very hard to cultivate) and a bank of good will. This came in handy. Fans of @PeggyOlson not only showed up for her in a big way, many of their tweets were quite inspired.

I vote for @PeggyOlson in the Shorty Awards Finals for #advertising because she can slay an anachronism in 140 characters! — @ProfOrganizer

I vote for @PeggyOlson in the Shorty Awards Finals for #advertising because...I love when my virtual reality worlds clash! — @SheriWhitt

I vote for @peggyolson in the Shorty Awards Finals for #advertising because of the fabulous, innovative role playing. — @Sidney_Williams

I vote for @peggyolson in the Shorty Awards Finals for #advertising because she revolutionized the way to market tv! — @annawhitlow

I vote for @peggyolson in the Shorty Awards Finals for #advertising because she was my first 2-way rel with a show. — @redw0rm

@PeggyOlson ended up with the second most number of votes across all categories in the preliminaries and went on to win the Shorty Award in advertising.

Since the Shorty Awards were slated to be broadcast live on YouTube, I realized I would finally have to reveal my identity. I didn't want to give it up without a little fanfare though, so I decided to do it *on stage* during the awards show. Not only did the promoters of the Shorty Awards use the promise of this



The year's best producers of short* content

*140 characters or less, on Twitter

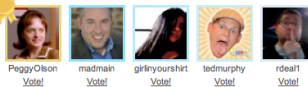
The first annual Shorty Awards Ceremony was held on February 11, 2009. Read what the [press had to say about it](#) and [watch video from the night](#). Get news about next year's awards and who to follow on Twitter by [joining the email list](#), [subscribing to the blog](#), or following [@ShortyNews](#) on Twitter.

[More about the Shorty Awards](#)

The 2008 Shorty Awards Winners and Finalists

advertising

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revelation to help promote the show, I was also able to offer the scoop to a Wall Street Journal reporter who was interested in covering The Shortys.

The story was covered by numerous other media outlets as well, including BusinessWeek.com, NYTimes.com and Wired.com. Michael Duff, a writer with LubbockOnline.com, even conducted a live "twinterview" that began with @PeggyOlson and segued into an interview with @CarriBugbee right after the show.

As Twitter grows, so does the Mad Men Twitterverse

In 2010, the *Mad Men* Twitterverse is more robust than ever. The original tweeters are still active, but there is a whole new crop of *Mad Men* tweeters as well. Since most of the character names were already taken, many of the new tweeters have appended their names with SCDP for Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce (the agency where Don and Peggy work in season four of the AMC TV program).

@PeggyOlson continues to get many tweets from fans who are thrilled to discover her. As in years past, they often believe it is part of an AMC marketing program. They are almost always thrilled to engage with Peggy, so I don't disavow them of that notion.

I never tweet from @PeggyOlson to @CarriBugbee or reference anything about me from Peggy's account. I like to maintain the mystery for Peggy's fans—as much as that's possible. While many marketers know I tweet for Peggy, I occasionally run into people who follow both of us but don't know we're the same person. When they find out, they usually say "Oh, *you're* @PeggyOlson? I love her!"

There's more of the story to tell, of course, including the insights I've gleaned about Twitter marketing, fan fiction, crisis communications, even group social dynamics—but that would require a lot more space. If you'd like to learn more, please follow @CarriBugbee on Twitter. If you're a *Mad Men* fan, engage with @PeggyOlson and the other *Mad Men* tweeters. They're the modern wave of advertising, don't you know?

