

# CASE APPLICATION #1

## Social Benefit or Social Disaster?

**T**weets. Twittering. Prior to 2006, the only definition we would have known for these words would have involved birds and the sounds they make. Now, practically everyone knows that Twitter is also an online service—with 500 million registered users, 400 million tweets daily, and 1.6 billion daily search queries—used to trade short messages of 140 characters or less via the Web, cell phones, and other devices.<sup>51</sup> According to its founders (Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams), Twitter is many things: a messaging service, a customer-service tool to reach customers, real-time search, and microblogging. And as the numbers show, it's become quite popular!

One place where Twitter has caught on is the sports world, especially in college sports. For instance, Les Miles, head football coach at Louisiana State University calls himself “a Twittering kind of guy.” He understands the power of instant communication. Miles wants to stay ahead of the competition, especially when it comes to recruiting and keeping fans informed. He's discovered that Twittering is an easy and fun way to communicate quick tidbits of information to fans, alumni boosters, and other interested people who subscribe. And it's a convenient way for football recruiting prospects to communicate with the coaching staff. On game days, he Twitters (via a staff assistant) before games, at halftime, and after games. If

companies to monitor athletes' posts. This, however, requires athletes to give access to their accounts, which some call an invasion of privacy.

### Discussion Questions

- 13-30** What are the advantages and drawbacks of universities using social media to communicate with various stakeholders—students, potential students, alumni, donors, etc.?
- 13-31** Do you think there would be more or fewer communication barriers when using social media? Discuss.

it's okay for coaches to tweet, what about the student athletes? That's often a different story.

Many universities and college coaches are monitoring and, in some cases, banning athletes' use of social media. A potentially precarious issue can arise if an athlete tweets some comment that could put the university in a negative light, offend boosters, or possibly violate an NCAA regulation. Here are a couple of tweeting slip-ups: A Western Kentucky running back was suspended after he tweeted critical comments about the team's fans; the NCAA pulled 15 football scholarships after an investigation based on a player's tweet; and a Lehigh University

wide receiver was suspended for re-tweeting a racial slur. We even saw how tweeting backfired at the London Olympics. The first “casualty”—a Greek

triple jumper—was banned from the Games over some racially charged tweets. That seems to be good reason for the managers (i.e., coaches and administrators) of these programs to attempt to control the information flow. But is banning the answer? Some analysts say no. They argue that those setting up rules and regulations don't understand what social media is all about and the value it provides as a marketing and recruiting tool, and they argue that it's necessary to understand First Amendment rights (part of which includes freedom of speech). Rather than banning the use of social media, many universities are hiring

- 13-32** What should managers do to be sure they communicate effectively when using social media?
- 13-33** Looking at the rules and regulations that universities are establishing, do you think that business organizations should have rules for employees using social media? What types of rules do you think would be necessary? Be as specific as possible.
- 13-34** What have been your experiences—both positive and negative—with social media? From your experiences, what guidelines could you suggest for managers and organizations?