



MATISYAHU'S TWITTER PASSION

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If you ever need more proof about how the digital age has changed the artist/fan relationship, look no further than Matisyahu.

The Hasidic reggae star, currently touring in support of his latest album, *Light*, is represented on every social networking platform, including MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube. Plus, as a 30-year-old artist, he's a member of a demographic already accustomed to online socializing. But when it comes to staying in touch with his fans, Twitter is his passion.

"I'm not paid by Twitter or anything on the side to promote Twitter," Matisyahu told Pollstar. "But I found I really connected with that specific outlet."

So far, 1 million fans have connected with Matisyahu via his tweets, but that shouldn't surprise anybody who has spent some time with the artist. He comes across as a young man who's totally comfortable with being digital.

He spoke to us while walking the streets of Eugene, Ore., only hours before he headlined a show in the college town. During the conversation he paused a couple of times - once to speak with a fan and another moment to speak with a stranger asking directions. He was multitasking taking in the sights and talking with folks all the while.

"Twitter I have on my phone," Matisyahu said. "I have my camera connected to it. My video camera connected to it. I can take video, I can take a picture, I can send it. I'm taking a walk and I see something interesting, something beautiful, something

strange - I take a picture of it, I send it. I read all the comments, pretty much daily."

One of the reasons Matisyahu was attracted to Twitter over other digital platforms is the service's brevity. Twitter's 140-character limit demands an economy with words. Successful Twitter users don't beat around the bush.



They get to the point, often using as few words as possible. It's a thriftiness with language Matisyahu not only appreciates, but enjoys.

"People don't like to go through and listen and read every message," Matisyahu said. "It's more about reading short things people have to say. I answer back. I really, actually genuinely connect with people. IT's strange, because with a musician, you figure the whole thing is about connecting.

"But the truth of the matter is you're kind of isolated going from show to venue to soundcheck, all of these different things. You don't really have time to make connections with people.

“Last night, for example, I sent out the message, ‘I’m in Vancouver. We have a show. I’m writing the set list. Any songs you want me to play? Anyone coming to the show want me to play some songs?’ The first five songs people responded with were the first five in the set list.”

Saying he establishes a “genuine connection” with fans through Twitter, Matisyahu isn’t only referring to an artist/ fan relationship, but that of just one person talking with another. While on tour it’s not uncommon for the artist to send tweets asking about local sights, restaurants, and attractions. And fans are more than happy to help him out.

“On the last tour I would say something like, ‘I have a day off. I’m in El Paso, Texas, at the Holiday Inn. Come see whassup.’

“I didn’t realize there were like five Holiday Inns in El Paso. But there were around 10 or 15 kids driving around to every Holiday Inn. They found me. I had my barbecue set up. We hung out. I gave them tickets to the next night. They came to the show and one of them brought me this beautiful picture of a sunset in El Paso. I shouted out at them at the show.

“Part of this whole thing I think is cool is that artists and musicians are people. We tend to get idolized, almost as if we’re not real. Just little things, like talking to each other and being real with each other, breaks that whole sort of facade.”

Matisyahu describes his experiences with Twitter as “organic,” saying that there wasn’t any one feature that attracted him to the platform, but the overall service was something that fit very well into his life.

“A lot of it has to do with the simplicity of it all,” Matisyahu said. “That’s part of the reason Apple and iPhone work so well. It all kind of works. It makes sense. It works with my personality.”

One thing that isn’t lost on Matisyahu is the newness of social networking services and how they help nurture the artist/fan relationship. Up until only a few years ago, the only contact performers would have with fans might be during backstage meet-and-greets arranged by local radio stations, or people hanging around outside the stage door hoping for autographs.

But could you imagine an Eric Clapton or Bob Dylan sending tweets back in the day? Matisyahu is well aware that the Twitters, Facebooks, and MySpaces of the world represent new frontiers for performers.

“When I was a kid, the whole concept of having interaction with an artist, a musician, was totally unheard of,” Matisyahu said, remarking that many fans often waited hours to meet their idols after performances.

For Matisyahu, it’s all about relating to fans and creating new experience. Although he only spends about 30 minutes a day using Twitter, it’s become an important part of his professional life. Plus, while touring, it helps lessen the drudgery of the road that so many artists have complained about over the years, the never-ending show, hotel, travel cycle.

But Matisyahu is doing more than making connection through Twitter. He’s making new fans and re-establishing relationships with old ones. He’s having fun and working at the same time. Although, from his perspective, it’s more fun than work.

Like when his tour stopped in Aspen and he had a yen for motorcycling. He sent out a tweet asking for the loan of a bike.

“And some dude showed up with a bike for me, gave me the keys, and let me take off for the afternoon on his motorcycle. I went up into the mountains, came back down, gave him tickets to the show.”

“You see the city. You see the people. You get on stage and it’s just lights in your eyes and there’s a lot of people out there. But you don’t have that connection. We strive for that.

That's what we go for. This way you feel like you're actually making connections."

Although Matisyahu might sound as if he lives for Twitter, he's very aware of how people might be sucked into social platforms and end up spending all their waking moments sending tweets or updating their Facebook pages. Twitter helps him run his life, but it doesn't rule it.

"I try to not to overdo it," Matisyahu said. "You can get carried away. That's the thing with all this social networking and all this technology is that you kind of have to keep it in its place. Use it for the right ways, but you could become totally obsessed and feel you need to report everything you're doing. Or you could feel you need to be checking messages all the time, seeing what people think about you, reading people's praises and stuff like that.

"It's definitely good to keep it in check. I try to kind of limit myself to a certain amount of messages per day."

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