



Presenting, Meet Tweeting

The rules for presentations change when your audience has an audience.

Cliff Atkinson is an accomplished presenter, has written a highly regarded book on the subject (*Beyond Bullet Points*), and has taught presenting at business schools, government agencies and Fortune 500 companies. But even he admits to being disconcerted and uncomfortable the first time it happened during one of his presentations.

Rather than looking at him, many members of his audience were focused on their laptops, where they were tapping out tweets about his presentation...*as he was giving it*. An informal "backchannel" had popped up, and those who were in it had an audience of their own, both inside the room and beyond.



Cliff Atkinson

As a regular attendee *and* presenter at technology conferences, Atkinson started to observe backchannels from both sides of the podium, and he realized this phenomenon was altering the experience of presenting. To help

presenters cope with these changes, he wrote his latest book, *The Backchannel: How Audiences are Using Twitter and Social Media and Changing Presentations Forever* (New Riders, 2009).

Backchannels are now starting to appear at conferences of all kinds, and public interest presenters should know how to prepare. With this in mind, I asked Atkinson to share his observations on how presenting - which isn't easy to begin with - just got more complicated:

Goodman: In your book, you call the backchannel "a double-edged sword." What's the constructive side of this sword?

Atkinson: First, a backchannel can tremendously broaden the reach of the presenter's message. For example, last July I was tweeting about a presentation I was attending here in Los Angeles. Somebody in New Zealand was reading my tweets and had a question. When I raised my hand and said, "I've got a question from New Zealand," the presenter

March 2010

Presenting, Meet Tweeting

Your audience has an audience, too.

Meet Better

Face to face and on the web

Master Storytellers Wanted

Two seats remain in the March class



About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.agoodmanonline.com and

was flooded, and I think everyone in the room got a visceral understanding of the power of the backchannel.

Second, it can give you an archive of real-time feedback that can help you analyze and improve your message and your delivery. And it's also another way for people in the room to meet each other.

Goodman: And the *destructive* side?

Atkinson: If the audience is unhappy, they can broadcast that unhappiness to the world. People can feel anonymous and may say more negative things in tweets than they would say to the presenter directly, and these comments can create a snowball effect where an entire audience turns against the presenter.

Goodman: Let's say you arrive in a room where the audience is tweeting and you *weren't* aware this might happen. What can you do on the spot to make this work for you?

Atkinson: Tell your audience that you noticed they're tweeting, and that you look forward to reading their comments after the presentation. With this simple acknowledgement, you remove the sense of anonymity that can sometimes lead to snarky comments.

Goodman: Now let's say you anticipate there will be a backchannel. How should you prepare differently?

Atkinson: First, offer your audience a *hashtag*, which is a code Twitter writers place in their posts to indicate they're attending your event. (For example, Twitterers at the South by Southwest Interactive Conference included the hashtag #sxswi in their posts.)

Pick the three most important ideas you would like your audience to tweet, and prepare a slide specifically for each point. On those slides, have the idea in the headline in less than 140 characters (which allows for easier re-tweeting.)

Also, leave more time in your presentation for discussion than usual, and take a few Twitter breaks so you can specifically address questions and comments from the backchannel, as well as from those in the room *not* in the backchannel.

Goodman: How can you possibly monitor the backchannel at the same time as presenting?

Atkinson: You can't, so ask someone you trust to monitor backchannel comments while you're speaking. They can help you sort through a large volume of tweets when it comes time for Q&A. If backchannel comments indicate the audience is extremely unhappy or bored, your moderator can also let you know this so you can address the concerns before they get out of hand.

Goodman: How can presenters take advantage of a backchannel *after* their presentation is over?

Atkinson: Scan the tweets and see if people actually tweeted the ideas that you thought were the most important. If they didn't, you may need to rethink how you make the ideas more sticky and tweet-able. You may

www.thegoodmancenter.com.

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 464-3956 or send an email to andy@agoodmanonline.com.



FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER

To subscribe to this newsletter, [click here](#). To unsubscribe, [click here](#).



a goodman

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

a goodman

444 North Larchmont Blvd.,
Suite 102

Los Angeles, CA 90004
323.464.3956



also find that an idea that you thought was minor was tweeted and re-tweeted. In this case, you may want to give the idea more attention in future presentations.

Goodman: I'm sorry, could you repeat that? I was tweeting about this interview on my iPhone while you were talking.

Atkinson: (hangs up)

(For more information, visit backchannelbook.com or contact Cliff directly at cliff (at) bbpmedia (dot) com. You can also follow him on Twitter: [@cliffatkinson](https://twitter.com/cliffatkinson).)

[^ back to top](#)

Meet Better

Whether you gather face-to-face or on the web, invest a few hours in our online classes and make all your meetings better.



If you hold meetings or trainings online and would like to improve these experiences, join us on March 12th (11a-12n PT) for ***The Webinar on Webinars***. In an engaging and fast-paced hour, we'll show you:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What we learned from talk radio that makes webinars work

Tuition is \$125 per student and discounts are available when you register 3 students or more. To learn more and register online, [click here](#).

Your organization probably invests countless hours in meetings every week, so why not invest two hours to make sure they actually accomplish something.



Meetings: Less Pain, More Gain is an interactive and fun webinar that has already helped numerous public interest groups, businesses, and schools. Our next classes will be held March 22nd and 24th (9am-10am PT) and tuition is \$250 per student. To learn more and register online, [click here](#).

[^ back to top](#)

Master Storytellers Wanted

Two spaces remain in the session beginning March 30th.

If you've completed one of my storytelling workshops and want to learn more about narrative nonfiction writing, the ***Master Storytellers Workshop*** is for you.

In three one-hour classes (with two weeks between each class), you'll have the opportunity to write up to three stories and receive personalized feedback from both your classmates and me.

We'll also explore topics not covered in previous storytelling workshops, including:

- How to craft scenes that make your story come alive
- How to find stories in abstract work
- Different techniques for opening and closing a story



The workshop is limited to just 10 students, so each online session will be highly interactive with plenty of time to discuss your work, but only two seats remain, so register today if you're interested.

The next session will run on March 30, April 13 and April 27 (9-10a PT each day). Tuition is \$375 per student. To download a complete course curriculum and register online, [click here](#).

[^ back to top](#)

[Share this newsletter with a colleague](#)

 **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to lori@agoodmanonline.com by andy@agoodmanonline.com.
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



a goodman | 444 North Larchmont Blvd., Suite 102 | Los Angeles | CA | 90004