

What Most Biotechies Are Missing on Twitter: A Huge Networking Opportunity

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[Twitter is coming to biotech](#), it's only a matter of time. And this is a truly wonderful thing.

This thought occurred to me as I sat in my Seattle office, watching a video from a [panel discussion](#) of eight people in Boston—journalists, executives, venture capitalists, a PR person—who were talking about how biotechies can get the most out of [Twitter](#). As I watched this, something dawned on me. I have personal relationships with all eight people on that panel and [Twitter](#) is the reason I met almost half of them. The other half, I have definitely gotten to know better because of what they say on Twitter.

I bring up this example because one of the biotech's best tweeters, [Stromedix](#) CEO Michael Gilman ([@michael_gilman](#)), said on this panel that Twitter has [helped him build a better network](#). While all of his fellow CEOs recognize they need to network, most still don't see how they can do that on Twitter. "They don't know what they're missing," Gilman said.

So I figured maybe I could help by offering a glimpse of what I have experienced on Twitter lately. Here are some of the people I've met in the Twittersphere, with a bit of color on what they are contributing to the emerging industry conversation that you can't find anywhere else.

Gautam Kollu, ([@gautamkollu](#)) VP of marketing at South San Francisco-based Exelixis.

Back in the old days of media, like the mid-aughts, I probably never would have interviewed someone like Kollu, at the VP level of a small biotech. He never would have had an opportunity to share his personal thoughts on the industry in the open. But now, he's free to chime in with well-informed opinion on timely topics like the marketing and pricing of cancer drugs. Take August 30, for example. An independent physician survey that I considered somewhat suspect, which I chose not to write about, took a shot at Dendreon's prostate cancer drug sipuleucel-T (Provenge). But this being the web, it spread far and wide. And I was fascinated to see what an insider like Kollu—whose company aspires to be a [Dendreon](#) competitor—had to say about this survey. He [wrote](#) on Twitter: "lame survey \$DNDN: 57% of docs say they won't prescribe life-extending drug unless <\$30K price. BS. Doesn't reflect reality."

This, as you can see, is way more interesting than if Kollu just passed along one of his company's press releases. And Kollu has shown on many occasions in the past month that he has smart, pointed analysis to offer on the marketing of several new cancer drugs. I still haven't called him on the phone, or met him in person, but you can bet I will soon.

John LaMattina, ([@John_LaMattina](#)) senior partner of Puretech Ventures, former president of R&D at Pfizer.

As the former president of R&D at the world's largest pharma company, LaMattina has a treasure trove of perspective on the drug development business. Frankly, he's the kind of guy who is hard to communicate with inside big companies, with all their gatekeepers and bureaucratic procedures. But now LaMattina is free to join the freewheeling conversation in real-time on Twitter. He's been a big addition the past few months. While he isn't the world's most prolific contributor to the medium—88 tweets since he joined in May—people are listening very carefully every time he says something. One of his early [tweets](#), on May 16, said, "What does it mean when a drug 'goes generic?' Are generic drugs safer than others? Get answers here:<http://wp.me/p1y8QX-s>."

If you follow that link, you can read a LaMattina blog post about how generics aren't really as safe as many people think. Then on Sept 1, he offered some quick commentary that didn't require a full-blown

blog post. In a Tweet directed to Forbes' Matthew Herper, TheStreet.com's Adam Feuerstein, and healthcare investor Nathan Sadeghi-Nejad, LaMattina offered comments on a Pfizer HIV drug. "Selzentry mkt [uptake](#) may have been limited by availability and expense of diagnostic test," he wrote. I haven't personally met LaMattina yet, but it's only a matter of time now—maybe my next trip to Boston.

Lastly, there are two new people I just started following this past week, and I'm looking forward to what they have to say over time. Maude Tessier ([@Maude_Tessier](#)), a licensing manager at Children's Hospital in Boston, popped up on my radar. She was a prolific tweeter who was essentially acting like a good set of eyes and ears from the [BioPharm America](#) conference in Boston. I wasn't able to attend, but Maude stepped in to fill a role that is traditionally played by journalists—by attending panels and publishing some of the best quotes in real-time on Twitter. Since I found her comments useful, I'll probably pay more attention now to what she says about other things.

The other person I started following this week was Jason Kelly ([@jrkelly](#)). The founder and self-described "DNA hacker" at Boston-based Ginkgo Bioworks chimed in on the latest [TechCrunch/CrunchFund controversy](#). Kelly directed a comment to Atlas Venture's Bruce Booth ([@LifeSciVC](#)) and Quintessence Biosciences' Laura Strong ([@scientre](#)) with this little pearl that caught my eye for obvious reasons: "what we really need is a biotech version of techcrunch — xconomy isn't really cutting it." I [replied](#) to Jason, asking him, "What would a biotech version of techcrunch look like to you?" Naturally, I looked him up on his site and found that he's a young PhD biologist from MIT, so I figured I should see if he has something interesting to say, or whether he just wants to be a crank. We ended up having an interesting back-and-forth conversation, out in the open among all our respective followers, about what the biotech community needs to improve its information flow.

When it was done, I realized I met someone who could be a great new member of my network, and that I learned something that could help me do my job better. That's what it's all about, and those are the kind of connections that are being made out there for biotechies willing to experiment a bit in how they communicate.