



# # <sup>WHAT THE</sup> Hashtag AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?!

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**A** whole magazine with a hashtag theme? What else could you need? Well, if you're not really active in social media, probably a little more information about what hashtags are and why they are so important.

If your experience with hashtags is #Sharknado or the Jimmy Fallon/Justin Timberlake video (look up "Jimmy Fallon hashtag" on YouTube; really – do it – it's pretty funny), then you probably are wondering why you should care.

Let's start with a little history. The very first hashtag (#barcamp) was suggested and used by Chris Messina, an open source/open web advocate, in August of 2007. He suggested it on Twitter as a way to group discussions about Barcamp, virtual technology gatherings that he helped create. After that, hashtags really went mainstream when Messina suggested the use of #sandiegofire in order for people to share information on the forest fires near San Diego that fall.

Since then, they've helped fuel the Arab Spring, leading to regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen (#Egypt and #ArabSpring) and brought us millions of old big hair photos and other memories for Throwback Thursdays (#ThrowbackThursdays or #TBT). They have also lead to participatory TV (#Sharknado) where the fun lies as much with viewers' comments as with what's on screen.

So with such diverse use, is there really a benefit for Microsoft Partners? The answer is YES. Before we get to that, let's start with the basics.

## **WHAT IS A HASHTAG?**

It's simple. A hashtag is a # sign (hash) followed by a word or group of words. The addition of the # sign makes the phrase searchable. When you use hashtags, you can organize posts to create a thread of conversations around a single topic. An example you've most likely seen is Microsoft Dynamics Convergence (#CONV14 for this past year's event), which allows Microsoft employees, Partners, and customers to see all that's being posted about the conference in a single thread – and at the same time creates a conversation with the social attendees.

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## Anatomy of a Hashtag: Rules and Tips for Creating a Great Hashtag

- » Always start with #.
- » No spaces. While you can have as many words as you want, you cannot have spaces. If you do have more than a single word, consider an initial uppercase letter on each word to make it more readable. For example: #HowToCreateAHashtag
- » Keep it short. The characters in a hashtag count toward your 140 word count on sites such as Twitter, so #BuyMicrosoftDynamicsERP is probably not a good idea. While you are unrestricted on Facebook and Google+, if you're going cross-platform, you'll want one hashtag you can use across all. Plus, why make it difficult for people to retype your hashtag?
- » Numbers are fine, but don't use punctuation or symbols.

## Follow The Leader: Hashtags You Should be Using Today

Not unexpectedly, Microsoft has A LOT of hashtags. There doesn't seem to be a central place where they all are listed, so we have compiled this short list of the most popular ones:

- » #MSDynamics
- » #MSDynERP
- » #MSDynCRM
- » #MSDynCOMM
- » #DynamicsGP
- » #MSDynGP
- » #MSDynAX
- » #MSDynNAV
- » #MSDynERP
- » #CONV15. (Although I've yet to see anyone using this tag, Microsoft has used CONV followed by the year for the last four Convergence events.)

## WE'RE NOT ON TWITTER – WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Great question. While the practice started and is extensively used on Twitter, today Facebook, Google+, and YouTube also take advantage of hashtags. The lone holdout? Instagram, which had enabled hashtags but discontinued their use last year.

Given their popularity and utility, it's likely we'll be seeing hashtags in other online communities (including those that don't exist today) and that at some point, LinkedIn will have some version of the hashtag back in its toolkit.

One thing to keep in mind: the platforms use hashtags differently, so you need to spend some time understanding the variations. For example, on Facebook, clicking on a hashtag takes you to posts with the same hashtag, while Google+ also pulls in posts with similar keywords and Google results.

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## WHEN SHOULD I CREATE ONE? HOW SHOULD I USE IT?

Create a hashtag when you have something “substantial” to share and you want others to join the conversation. For example, when you're hosting a customer event. Set up a hashtag, and then share it with Partners, ISVs, customers, and employees. Encourage everyone to use the tag before, during, and after the event. In other instances, you may want to take more of a “follow the leader” approach. If you're going to be at Convergence, for example, use the hashtag that Microsoft is using for maximum exposure for your posts.

Want something unique? You can use more than one hashtag in a post (note that the recommendation is to keep it under three), so it's okay to use #CONV14 and a custom tag you create in the same post. By the way: You don't need to start a sentence with a hashtag – they can go anywhere, as in: Join us at #rocknrave at #GPUGSummit.

## HOW DO I CREATE ONE?

Type a # sign followed by the word or phrase that describes your conversation; then tweet or post. Really, it's that easy! The challenging part is knowing what word or phrase you want to use. Here are two simple steps to follow:

- » Start by making sure your hashtag is available. If you use a hashtag someone else is using, you are joining their conversation. You can check out hashtags that are in use, and see how they're trending on Twitter, with free tools including [www.twubs.com](http://www.twubs.com) and [www.hashtags.org](http://www.hashtags.org). These sites make it easy to see if someone else is already using your idea.
- » Although anyone can use your hashtag for any reason, you should still define or register it. This makes it easier for people who are searching for topics to know if they're in the "right" conversation. #MicrosoftDynamics might be obvious. #CONV14 – not as much. On Twubs, when you register, you can also set up a page for your hashtag. This is a great idea if you're using the hashtag for an event. You can create an event room and even get embedded code, which enables you to put the conversation on your website.

### NEXT STEPS?

Hashtags do not have to be scary. Hopefully you have learned some new ways to use and create them. If you're still unsure of how you might use a hashtag, why don't you start by joining the conversation for this fall's The Partner Connections Event (#TPCE14)? Share your experience and connect with the speakers and attendees. You might be surprised to see who else is posting, what you may have missed, or who you might run into at the event. 🌟

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