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Off-Topic | Alicia Eler

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Off-Topic invites artists, curators, writers, and cultural workers to discuss a subject not directly related to the practice of making art. We would like to welcome Alicia Eler as our latest guest with her post, “Where did all the Tweets go? A conversation lost on Twitter”. Alicia is a writer, critic, curator and the Arts & Culture Community Manager of [ChicagoNow.com](#).

Where did all the Tweets go? A conversation lost on Twitter

GUEST POST BY [ALICIA ELER](#)

Is it easier and more efficient to host conversations on Twitter or Facebook? This was my only question when I began research for this blog post. Things changed when Twitter lost the conversation, which is ironic because the conversation is the entire point of Twitter.



I, [@aliciaeler](#), organized what was to be my first of many conversations about lesbian movies on Twitter. The conversation would begin with tweets from Chicago celebsians [@trishtype](#), the Afterellen.com Blog Editor; lesbian erotic fiction writer [@deviantdyke](#); queer sex blogger [@annapulley](#); freelance writer and bonafide lesbian [@jennispinner](#); and ChicagoNow tattoo blogger/AfterEllen.com music blogger [@chubbyjones](#). Later, we could move to Facebook and try it again. For the Twitter convo, [@jennispinner](#) and I came up with the idea to label tweets with hashtag #lezflix. The chat began promptly at 2pm on Tuesday, November 24, 2009, and lasted well over the 10 minutes we had originally planned. Lesbian twitterers from all over the country jumped in.

When I went back to find those tweets a few weeks later, however, they were gone. I even went to my [saved search #lezflix](#) on Twitter.com. Nothing.

With my original plan foiled, I realized that I needed to do two things:

1. Figure out how to prevent tweets from getting lost in the future, and
2. Retrieve tweets from the #lezflix conversation using search

For advice, I contacted my social media-savvy friends [Leah Jones](#), founder of Natiiv Arts & Media, a social media coaching business for artists, musicians and writers; [Craig Kanalley](#), Traffic and Trends Editor at [Huffington Post](#) and founder of [BreakingTweets.com](#); and [Daniel Honigman](#), Digital Supervisor at [Weber Shandwick](#). I also tweeted and gchatted with [Sachin Agarwal](#), the Operations Lead at [OneForty.com](#), the Twitter App Store.

When I first approached Daniel Honigman with this problem the other month, he suggested two ways to avoid losing tweets: Export the tweets to an Excel spreadsheet post-conversation, or use [BackUpIfy.com](#), a service that backs up your online life (free until January 31). Currently, you can back up Flickr, Twitter, Delicious, Zoho, Google Docs, Photobucket and Wordpress. Services in Beta include Basecamp, Gmail (!), Facebook, FriendFeed, Blogger and Hotmail; soon users will be able to back-up YouTube, Xmarks, RssFeed and Tumblr accounts.

Another way to save tweets, says Leah Jones, is to “do a search on search.twitter.com for your hashtag, then subscribe to the results via RSS and Google Reader.” If you do this, says Jones, “Google will make a database of those tweets for you, and they’ll go onto your Google Reader.”


Unfortunately, it’s too late for the #lezfliX conversation. The tweets are gone. What can I do now?

[Sachin Agarwal](#), who spends his days immersed in Twitter at oneforty.com, says that searching for different terms was the only way to retrieve tweets. “You’re searching summize (Twitter search) for the hashtag, and that search index only has a week or so of data.” Instead, he suggests I search for both the hashtag—in this case, #lezfliX—and some of the movies talked about during the conversation, rather than searching for the terms #lezfliX and Twitter. “Bound,” “Better Than Chocolate” and “Desert Hearts” were the first ones that came to mind. Kanalley echoed that advice, suggesting I search using both Google and Bing.com.


So let the search begin.

Search #1: Searching Google for Twitter #lezfliX brought up [these results](#).

These were the first and only tweets to come up:



[reprizal](#) #lezfliX another old one, did anyone ever see the french movie “Entre Nous”? 24 Nov 2009 from [Echofon](#)



[xanontl](#) @aliciaeler re: #lezfliX: bound, obviously 😊 25 Nov 2009 from [TweetDeck](#) in reply to [aliciaeler](#)

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Followed by a link to Twitter user [@msbutch84](#).

These three women all joined in the conversation after it began.

Here are the two #lezfliX tweets I found on the November 24, 2009, archive of [HelloChicago.com](#), a site that grabs Chicago tweets daily.

@AnnaPulley Is Bound a #lezfliX by def? It’s made by two dudes. Can it be a les movie if it’s not written/directed by a female? **Posted by jennispinner** in Chicago, IL

i just couldn’t get into IBTC – too forced and i love jamie babbitt’s other work so i was so bummed! good soundtrack and effort tho #lezfliX **Posted by trishtype** in Chicago, IL

Similarly, on the hyperlocal front, the site [Localtwt.com](#) discovered a #lezfliX tweet from Elko, South Carolina.

#lezfliX also showed up under the movie Spider Lilies on [SeeandTweet.com](#), a site where users can find Twitter movie reviews, see movie trailers, get movie showtimes, and buy tickets. Unfortunately,

when I went to the link that popped up on Google, I couldn't find any mention of #lezflix.

Google found my @aliciaeler Twitter streams archived on [MixTweet](#) and [Twaitter](#), which I didn't know I had, and [FriendFeed](#), a service that I set-up to stream my Twitter.

[Japanese website Twimpact](#) picked up and translated @annapulley's tweet about the lesbian sex scene in the film *Better Than Chocolate*.

Search #2: Searching Bing for Twitter #lezflix

Bing does not compare to Google. Searching for Twitter #lezflix brought up a [single tweet from @annapulley](#).

These two general searches helped uncover a few tweets, and if I wanted to get more specific I would take Sachin's advice and do a search for #lezflix and the name of a movie (e.g. Bound, Desert Hearts, Better Than Chocolate), or just a search for Ilene Chaiken, creator of The L-Word. In fact, the first search for #lezflix Ilene Chaiken brings up [every post on Tumblr that has been tagged with Ilene Chaiken](#).

Here's the reality, though: Twitter kills off tweets after two weeks. The time period used to be four months or 1,000 tweets, reports [ToThePC](#). If you want your tweets to stay alive after two weeks—the same time it takes bed bug eggs to hatch into nymphs—back them up before it's too late.

Interested in learning more about how you can use Twitter? Check out my blog for posts about [Twitter users' reactions to the Health Care Reform Bill](#), [how we won the Maine Question 1 vote on Twitter but lost it in real life](#), and [sizing up Chicago LGBT publications' Twitter feeds](#).

About the poster:

Alicia Eler is a writer, art critic and new media art curator. Her work has been published in [Artforum.com](#), [Art Papers](#), [Time Out Chicago](#), [Chicago Tribune](#), [Newcity Newspaper](#), [Flavorpill](#), [Kansas City Review magazine](#), the [Windy City Times](#), and [Curve Magazine](#), among [others](#). She is the Arts & Culture Community Manager of [ChicagoNow.com](#), a network of hyperlocal blogs sponsored by the Chicago Tribune Media Group, and a frequent [Tweeter](#).

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