

## Charlotte Dawson: How the cyber trolls beat me

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Television personality Charlotte Dawson is interviewed about being taunted on Twitter after being released from hospital. Picture: 60 Minutes

Source: Supplied

**TROLLING victim Charlotte Dawson has told of how a hate campaign on Twitter got the better of her and landed her in hospital.**

Speaking for the first time about the torrent of abuse she received on Twitter last Wednesday night, the 46-year-old TV presenter told *60 Minutes* last night: "I've never had death threats of this ferocity. I've never had a campaign of this ferocity."

Dawson was admitted to hospital after she was targeted by a stream of abusive death threats on Twitter, including taunts to "stick your head in a toaster" and "kill yourself".

After spending hours fending off the insults, Dawson signed off with the disturbing message "you win x" along with a picture of a hand holding pills at 2.07am.

Just after 3am, an ambulance arrived at her home and took her to Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital.

Dawson said it was the relentless and vicious messages that finally broke her.

"It just triggered that feeling of helplessness when the trolls got to me," Dawson said.

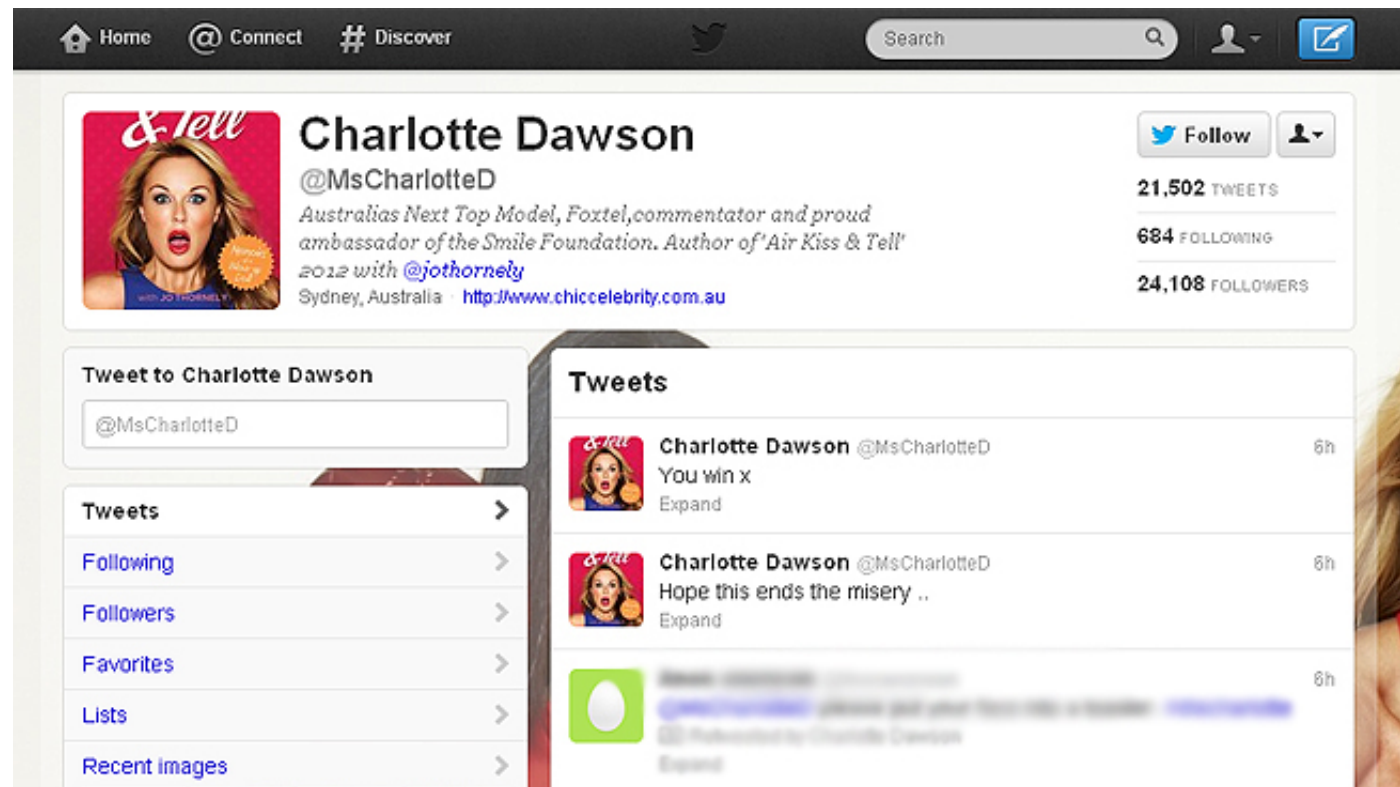
"They got the better of me and they won."

Dawson said as a celebrity she expected to cop a certain amount of abuse.

"You do have to have a thick skin and you do understand that no matter what you do, even if you're Mother Teresa,

people are still going to hate you just because they think you're ugly or they don't like the sound of your voice," she said.

"If people are wanting you to kill yourself and you are somebody who has previously tried to end your life it's very, very easy to feel like that's exactly what you want to do."



Charlotte Dawson was taken to hospital after she signed off Twitter with the disturbing message "you win x". Photo: Twitter

Dawson is not the only victim of cyber trolls. **Biggest Loser winner Margie Cummins was targeted with abusive and derogatory messages** (<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/biggest-loser-margie-cummins-bombarded-by-abuse-from-cyber-trolls/story-e6freuy9-1226463505518>).

Cummins, 34, said the online abuse began while the show was still filming, before she was even allowed access to a computer.

Messages were posted on the show's website forums and social media, criticising her looks and personality and threatening her with harm.

"There were people threatening to burn down my home and kill my animals," she said.

It was just horrendous. It took my breath away then and it still does now."

Despite the trolling attacks, **Twitter has refused to police vicious and abusive messages posted online** (<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/national/free-to-post-vile-twitter-attacks/story-fndo317g-1226463501410#>).

Twitter spokeswoman Rachel Bremer said the company did not mediate content, regardless of whether it was "potentially" offensive.

"Twitter provides a communication service that allows controversial posts even though some may disagree with the content," she said yesterday.

"We understand everyone has different levels of sensitivity towards content, and that you may feel uncomfortable with the posted content. If there is something that you don't agree with, or find insulting, it's best to block that user."

But for victims of relentless online abuse, it is rarely that easy. Vitriol aimed at Twitter users often comes quickly and from many quarters, making it hard for a victim to block each user before the abuse takes its toll.

"Quite often these cyber-trolls have a pack mentality," Lifeline spokesman John Mendel said. "So if the victim has exposed themselves and shown a weakness, they often invite further attacks from other people who misuse social media for these purposes."

Twitter's rules dictate users cannot post illegal material or "direct, specific threats".

However, that does not preclude such comments as the "Go hang yourself" tweet that brought the issue to a head last week when it was sent to TV host Charlotte Dawson.

Ms Bremer said Twitter permitted "potentially inflammatory content" provided it did not violate its terms of service.

In fact, the company's terms of service tells users they "may be exposed to content that might be offensive, harmful, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate, or in some cases, postings that have been mislabeled or are otherwise deceptive".

They then go on to say that Twitter will not be held responsible for any of them.

Neither Twitter nor Facebook offer direct phone support for users who are harassed online.

Complaints from Australian Facebook users are sent half-way around the world, either to customer service centres in India, Ireland or the US. The company claims to respond to most within 72 hours, although more serious cases are prioritised.

Based in San Francisco, Twitter has ballooned to more than 500 million users since American web developer Jack Dorsey launched it in 2006. Last December it was valued at \$8 billion.

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Herald Sun