

# **SOCIALBOTS 2011 OFFICIAL RULES AND REGULATIONS**

*Prepared by the Society for Robotic Research and Defense (RR&D)*

## **Overview and Task:**

Teams will program bots over a two week period, which are then put into play in an competition to influence and elicit social behaviors on the part of a set of 500 Twitter user "targets." The team which is able to robotically acquire the highest level of social capital over the course of the game is declared the winner.

Gameplay itself is broken into two week-long rounds in which the bots will score points. Between these two rounds, teams will have an opportunity to tweak their bots and improve performance.

## **Description of Targets:**

We have assembled a target group of 500 Twitter users, provided with this ruleset. These users were generated for their high level of activity (the majority of the targets tweet more than once a day) and were generated by starting with a core group of accounts and randomly selecting connected accounts (and then accounts following those accounts). The result is a semi-connected cluster of users that form the battlefield of Socialbots. The average number of followers per user in the graph hovers around 600.

## **Rules of Play:**

To facilitate experimentation with many different approaches, the control and behavior of the bots launched by teams is left largely open to the decision of the players. However, during play, bots MUST conform to the following requirements:

- 1) No Humans Allowed: The only interaction between the targets and the teams should be through the robots. Existing accounts held by users and their friends on Twitter should not interact with the targets.
- 2) Countermeasures and Reporting as Spam: Teams may not report the accounts run by other teams as spam or bots to Twitter. Doing so will result in penalty and potential exclusion from the remainder of the game. However, this rule does not exclude teams from executing other countermeasures and strategies to impede the progress of other teams.
- 3) No Revealing The Game: Bots are not allowed to reveal the presence of the Socialbots game to the target group of users. However, they are permitted to reveal themselves to be bots.
- 4) All Code To Be Open Sourced: By participating in the game, teams assent to the licensing of all their code produced for Socialbots under the MIT license.

5) Collaboration: Teams are permitted to contact one another to share code and coordinate their actions.

### **Scoring:**

Each team will define a “lead” bot. The only points that will be scored during the game are interactions between the target group and the lead bot. However, teams are permitted to launch as many additional bots into the field as they wish to assist the lead bot or otherwise change the target battlefield (though their interactions will not be added to the total score). Scoring will be as follows:

- For each mutual connection between the target group and the lead bot, one point will be rewarded
- For each interaction (@ reply, retweet, or mention) between the lead bot and the target group, three points will be awarded.
- If the lead account is killed off in action by Twitter or by the target users, the team will be penalized 15 points. They will then be allowed to tweak the bot code and relaunch their lead bot. Teams will be only permitted three “resets.” Beyond that point, the team will be considered “out of play” and will not score any additional points for the remainder of the game. As a result, teams are encouraged to conduct appropriate playtesting of the bots before putting them into the field of play.

The team with the most points at the close of the game at 12:01 AM February 7, 2011 will be declared the winner.

### **Schedule (all times noted are in Pacific Standard - UTC-8) --**

#### *January 10 - January 23 - **Coding Period***

During this period, teams may strategize and code the bots that will run during Round One. They may playtest the bots (obeying the No Humans Allowed) rule, and coordinate with other teams as desired. Mission control is available during this time to answer any questions and will issue clarifications as necessary.

#### *January 23 - **Launch Day***

On launch day, teams must provide mission control with the handle of their lead bot as well as any other bots they will have operating on the targets. While each team will know the name of all the other teams’ lead bots, any other bots in operation will be kept secret and tracked only by mission control. Any code being run by the team for the purpose of the game should also be provided to mission control on Launch Day, which will allow us to monitor whether accounts are in fact being powered by scripts and not humans.

As soon as both the handles and the code are provided, teams may set the bots to be operational, though no points will be scored until Round One begins.

### *January 24 - January 29 - **Round One***

Beginning on 12:01 AM on January 24th, Round 1 will begin. Points will be scored by teams until 12:01 AM January 30th. No code may be changed for any operating bots during this time, and no additional bots may be added by the teams.

### *January 30 - **Tweak Day***

Round One will officially end on January 29. Beginning 12:01 AM on January 30th, teams will be allowed to tweak all operating bots (both the lead bot and any others) for the following week. This includes improvements of code, as well as user profiles and other elements of the bots. Teams can also place more bots into play. If teams so choose, they may also choose to switch which bot will be their “lead bot” for the coming week. None of these actions are required.

After sending any new code to mission control, the renewed bots can begin running at any point on January 30th and onwards. However, no points will be scored by any team until the beginning of Round Two on January 31st.

### *January 31 - February 6 - **Round Two***

Beginning on 12:01 AM on January 31st, Round 2 will begin. Points will be scored by teams until 12:01 AM February 7.

### *Beyond - **Recap and Discussion***

The code will be published online, and a general discussion will be scheduled for all teams to share experiences, talk about the design of future competitions, and discuss strategies that worked/did not work.