



Let's talk about LinkedIn®

By Kristin Sundin Brandt

So you are on LinkedIn. Maybe you've been on for a few months, maybe for a few years. Perhaps you joined because your friend/colleague/boss/vendor/neighbor invited you. And maybe, just maybe, you don't really know why you have an account or what you should be doing with it.

Let's talk.

Should you be on LinkedIn?

Let's get this one out of the way — if you do any level of networking with the goals of generating new business, creating new relationships with vendors or partners or strengthening existing relationships, you should be on LinkedIn.

Why is that? Simply put, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network with "300 million members in over 200 countries and territories around the globe."

Beyond connecting you with potential clients and partners, LinkedIn can be a valuable resource for hiring, personal branding, marketing and research.

It can also be completely overwhelming for someone trying to maximize his or her time and efforts through the channel.

Start with your goals

Whether opening your profile for the first time, or looking to give it a

refresh, you need to start by determining what you hope to achieve through LinkedIn.

Through this process you should also define your audience — to whom are you trying to connect, and what type of content will they find compelling? This information will be essential not only as you write your profile, but also as you plan out future updates and connection requests.

Look around

Take a look at profiles from people within the industry, as well as those you consider mentors or role models, and consider what you think works best. What can you do to emulate what works and avoid what doesn't?

Look in the mirror

LinkedIn offers you the opportunity to look at your profile as Connections and the Public see you — take the opportunity to review your profile, with special consideration to:

- Your profile picture — There is still a significant percentage of people on LinkedIn who use the default “Mr./Ms. Anonymous.” This, in my mind, is the real world equivalent of appearing at a networking event with a bag on your head. Remove the bag, and post a photo that is clear and easy to see and avoids the need to crop out busy backgrounds or other people. That being said, don't be afraid to show a little personality if it is appropriate.
- Your headline — The majority of people will use their job title as their headline. Consider instead a headline that will grab attention and highlight your strengths or specialties. For example, instead of “Vice President, Mortgage Lending,” consider “Experienced home financing specialist serving customers in Central Texas.”
- Your summary — Beyond your job description, your LinkedIn summary does just that, summarizes your experience, your strengths and your capabilities. It can also show a little (or a lot) of your personality. Again, take a look around for summaries that resonate with you for inspiration.
- Your interest, skills and other information — LinkedIn is not the time to be humble. If you have the skills, tell people! Interests such as mountain biking, skiing, dog breeding, can provide an additional opportunity for connection and/or conversation.

After reviewing and revising your profile, don't be afraid to ask someone else to take a look. Also, consider printing out the page — as many of us know, it's easy to miss something when reading from the screen.

Tip: Consider turning off activity broadcasts when making a lot of

edits to your profile. You can do this by going to Account *Settings* > *Profile* > *Turn on/off your activity broadcasts*. Just don't forget to turn the setting back on when you are done.

Make connections

In the past when receiving a business card at a networking event, I would put that contact information in my address book (or, it would sit in a stack of business cards that would eventually end up in the circular file). Today, my general rule is if I left a networking event with your card, I will request a connection through LinkedIn.

But not all connection requests are the same, and you should be wary of LinkedIn's default request settings.

Clicking “Connect” will automatically send the notice “I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn.” While not inherently offensive, the notice is easily recognized by all as the default setting. Instead, by hovering over the arrow next to the “Send InMail” button, you can personalize your invitation, allowing you the opportunity to include information that will increase the chances your connection request will be accepted.

Determining to whom you want to connect, as well as which requests to accept, will come down to your target audience and your comfort with being “connected.” For example, some of us are happy to connect with competitors, while others choose not to.

Tip: On a regular basis, review “People you should know” for new connections. As you grow your network, this list will become more accurate.

Share updates and information

Like Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn provides users the opportunity to share updates with their networks:

- Updates — The most common method of sharing information, you can include status updates, share news and link to outside websites.
- Posts — Creating a post is akin to blogging on LinkedIn, with content hosted on the channel, rather than on your own website.

How often you share, and what you share, will come down to what you believe your target audience is

interested in. For example, a mortgage originator on LinkedIn may be looking to connect with realtors and other referral sources, so the content she shares may be related to how those referral sources can grow their businesses, or financing changes that may impact their clientele.

Let's be honest — creating content can be difficult and is generally not in most people's job description. So take a look around to see what content is easily available to you — for example, follow your organization on LinkedIn and share updates to your personal network.

To keep yourself on track, set a goal for how many times you will share — one to two times a week is a good place to start.

Also, don't forget LinkedIn is a professional network, so think twice before sharing something of a personal nature.

Tip: Before sharing a product or offer, be sure to check with your marketing or compliance department to ensure your update complies to any rules or regulations.

Review your results

On an ongoing basis, LinkedIn will provide feedback on your profile's performance, including how you rank among professionals in your industry, as well as what you can do to improve your ranking.

You can also see the number of times your profile was viewed, what actions were taken and who has viewed your profile recently. Reviewing this information will help you determine if your efforts are on the right track or what changes need to be made.

Remember

In the words of Dr. Spock, (the pediatrician, not the Vulcan), “you know more than you think you do.” As business and financial professionals, networking is a fundamental part of your job — LinkedIn is just an extension of these efforts.

Tip: Don't try to do it all at once. Do what you can and aim to add in a bit more each month. ♦

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