

Ten Tips to Using LinkedIn Effectively

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network on the Internet with at the time this was written, more than 100 million members in over 200 countries and territories. The LinkedIn website launched in 2003 and currently counts executives from all Fortune 500 companies as members.

You may have a profile, several connections and even a handful of peer recommendations. But are you really using LinkedIn to its full potential? Here are 10 tips to help you improve your use of the world's largest professional network so you can reach the tipping point and really get some traction:

1. Raise your profile

Apart from your own website and YouTube channel, your LinkedIn profile is one of the easiest ways potential clients, employees and industry partners can find you online. To get your profile to appear higher in search results, you can customize your LinkedIn profile URL so that your first and your last name appear as one word (i.e. JoeSmith). Also, make sure your profile is visible to everyone by selecting 'public' in your account settings.

2. Be loud and proud

Make sure you fill out the summary and experience sections of your profile. People with at least one past position listed on their profile are 12 times more likely to be viewed for potential opportunities. Include keywords and phrases that clients might search in your profile description. Be proud of who you are and what you've achieved – add skills and experience to your profile and don't forget to upload a photo. Professionals with a photo are seven times more likely to be viewed in general.

3. Stay fresh

Let your connections know what you're up to and how your business or career is growing by updating your status regularly. Use status updates to announce new products, to post interesting articles, and even to get answers to business questions you're pondering. Another time-saving tip: Sync your Twitter, Blog and LinkedIn accounts so your updates get posted to all networks simultaneously – more traffic for less effort!

4. Create a company page

Create a LinkedIn Company Page so clients can "follow" your company. There are more than two million company pages on LinkedIn. Add a "Products & Services" tab so you can inform potential clients about your offerings. Make sure you follow competitors, clients and companies that you admire so you get the latest information from those companies as well.

5. Grow your tribe

Connect to at least 50 people that you know, like and trust. It's the 'magic number' of connections to have on LinkedIn. When you connect to at least 50 employees, clients, business partners, friends etc. that's when you start seeing more first, second and third degree connections that can help you get in touch with people or companies that will help propel your business. Import your address book to find out which of your contacts are already on LinkedIn (hint – you can also export your LinkedIn list).

6. Create social proof

Social proof, also known as informational social influence, is a psychological phenomenon where people assume the actions of others reflect good behaviour for a given situation driven by the assumption that other people possess more knowledge about the situation. People then make choices and conform to choices as a form of herd behaviour. Phew – enough of the lecture, basically recommendations are one of the best ways to secure new clients, because they spread virally on LinkedIn. They also enhance your professional credibility and create a good impression when potential clients read your profile. One of the most influential aspects of buying decisions is social proof. Request recommendations from happy customers and suggest some of the key things that you'd like them to mention in the recommendation.

7. Get info on the go

Use LinkedIn's BlackBerry or iPhone apps to get info when you're on the move. Are you running late to a meeting and want to get more information about someone before a meeting? Use the app to look up their profile. You can also use the apps to find connections you have in common with people before you see them in person at a conference. Easy, fast, portable access, awesome!

8. Find other people with similar interests

If you are a small business owner or entrepreneur for example, search for "small business" or "entrepreneur" related LinkedIn Groups. Groups are a great way to engage with like-minded people who can provide you support and answer SMB-specific questions. Also join groups that are related to your industry, city or topic. Look for groups where your target markets hang out too. (If you usually sell to working mothers, join working mother related groups to get a better feel for the topics and discussions your potential customers are concerned about.)

9. Find staff, partners and experts

Whether you want to hire a super salesperson, a web designer or an expert to help you solve a problem, LinkedIn's Advanced People Search is an easy way to search by title, company name and even postcode (zip code) to find exactly the person you're looking for. Any member can search those facets for free by clicking the "Advanced" link in the top right hand corner of LinkedIn after they sign in.

10. Stay on top of trends

Visit LinkedIn daily to get valuable insights about your connections and their activities. Follow the top trending news each day on LinkedIn Today so you're up-to-speed on industry news.

