

# LinkedIn- What's all the fuss about?



In its most simple of forms, LinkedIn is an online business to business network, allowing people to connect professionally all over the world.

In recent times, LinkedIn has seen a surge in popularity with time poor professionals using the site as a means to maintain current relationships and build new ones.

But it must be said that LinkedIn is not a substitute for face to face networking, rather a significant means of increasing your networking opportunity without spending hours out of the office. And of course with more people accessing the Internet with mobile devices, networking on LinkedIn has become a popular past time for busy professionals sitting at an airport, a train station, or even at home during evenings and weekends, when the pressures of that particular working day are behind them.

As with all social media machines, LinkedIn is still young and experts the world over are still trying to figure out the most effective ways of using it to best advantage and there are already a myriad of ways to get involved.

This short guide is drawn from the benefit of experience – from a still quite youthful 36 year old, who studied marketing in the days way before social media existed – in fact, in the days before mobile phones existed!

Having worked in Marketing for over 15 years I have had no choice over the past few years but to acquaint myself with all things digital, online and social as the world of marketing has changed to the highest degree. The guidelines below will hopefully give you some ideas as to how LinkedIn could work for you and how you/your business could get involved.

## ***What can LinkedIn do for you?***

The key purpose of LinkedIn is to facilitate networking and introduction within business communities. Consider it as online word of mouth, proven to be one of the most powerful marketing tools.



Not only does it allow you to keep in touch with all those people who already connect to you and your business, but it allows you to build new relationships through professional introductions.

LinkedIn allows you to promote your own personal brand and has proven a useful tool in recruitment for both employer and employees. It also helps people to promote their businesses and their expertise, by getting involved in “LinkedIn Answers”, a sub division of LinkedIn which allows users to ask questions they need an answer to and others to answer them.

It is also possible to form or join groups on LinkedIn, of like minded or similar professionals with whom you share a common challenge or goal.

Another key benefit of the site is its potential for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). This is the process whereby you manage your website to ensure it is as high as possible within search engine rankings, so if someone searches for your type of business, it has an increased likelihood of being found, typically on the first page.

Having as many people as possible from your business on LinkedIn has been shown to increase Search Engine Rankings, as it has great authority with Google – as with all things SEO, good rankings are never guaranteed unless you pay for them, but a connection on LinkedIn might certainly help.

Each of these key benefits could form an article in their own right, such is the depth of information available, although for now I am going to outline how you can best take advantage of opportunities through LinkedIn, for its key purpose - to network and make connections online.

## ***Getting Started***

If you already have a LinkedIn Profile and have made connections you can skip straight to the section – Tips for Getting the Best from LinkedIn. If you don't have a profile yet, it is very easy to set up.

Visit LinkedIn.....choose “Join Today” and start to put your profile together. You will see the profile is split into many sections, from your current and past employment, your education and your related website. It will also show how many connections you have as you build them up.

The first key section will ask you to demonstrate your experience, which is essentially a list of all the positions you have held during your career. It will also allow you to complete a section on your education, both of which are particularly useful to allow ex –colleagues and school/friends to find you.

You will also be asked why you want to be contacted - most people choose getting back in touch, reference requests, business deals etc, and you can tailor yours to suit.

This initial information forms the basis of your public profile on LinkedIn, but only the people you connect with can see your full profile and have access to your connections. You can edit and update your profile as often as you like, in fact LinkedIn actively encourages you to do it for best practice, and the site will take you through profile set up step by step.

## ***Making Connections.***

The idea behind LinkedIn is “I'll show you mine if you show me yours”. You connect to people you know, then you can see who they know. If these include people you would like to make a connection with, you simply ask politely and professionally if they will make an introduction. There's no need to be shy, for most people on LinkedIn, that's what they are there for - they are expecting to be asked to make introductions and hoping that they can make some as well.

To start building your own network first of all, get together a list of people you work with, have worked with or have had a professional connection to. Search for them and when you find them, simply click on the button “Add to your network” – with any luck they will accept your request to connect and you can keep in touch.

The next element is to see who your connections are connected to.....perhaps you could find someone who you also mutually know, or someone you would like to get to know. If you don't already know them, ask for a referral and if you do know them, ask them directly to connect.

LinkedIn is an extremely well designed, user friendly site and all the available actions are well explained and visible.



## ***Tips for getting the best from LinkedIn***

So you have set up your profile and made some connections – now make sure you are working LinkedIn as effectively as possible.

- Make sure you have included your job location and title – these are very important. With 10 million users, names can be duplicated and you should make it as easy as possible for people to find you.
- Always include an up to date photograph – people might be fairly certain that you are you, but how will they know if you make it difficult for them to find out. Also, people like to engage with people, not a blank space. You can choose who sees your photograph though if you deem this necessary, by changing your profile preferences to “visible to my connections only” within your account settings
- Make sure you include your entire job history – old colleagues may search for you or even better, may come across you when searching for Alumni.
- Update your profile regularly with any changes or additions – people you connect with will want to see your current information, especially if they are going to ask for referrals on your behalf
- Aim to have a 100% profile rating – LinkedIn will tell you how much your profile is rated, in relation to the amount of information you have posted and the number of sections you have completed. To use it to its best advantage, aim for 100%.
- Be careful of the information you post, as this is a public forum after all – and even though access is tightly controlled, you should be cautious when defining the nature of your relationships with your connections, so that this would not divulge any confidential information
- Be aware that you can change your privacy controls so that only you can see your connections, although this does make LinkedIn rather one sided and a lot less interactive.
- Make LinkedIn an active part of your working life – set aside time every week to connect with people and seek out potential referrals – you will only get out what you put in. It doesn't have to be a long time, 15 minutes should suffice at the initial stages but it is important that you remain as active as possible.
- Ask for recommendations – the number of recommendations you have show on your profile and it is a great way to market yourself and showcase your personal brand.

So once you are up and running and working your connections, referrals and recommendations, you should consider stage two - joining or forming groups and getting involved in LinkedIn answers where you can really showcase your expertise! LinkedIn itself is a great source of advice for how to use the site and really broaden the depth of your activity.



LinkedIn is a learning curve and does require it's users to be savvy in order to get as much from their time as possible – but it could be time well spent if you can work clever, increase your referrals and build as effective a network of connections as you can.