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Are You Making the Most of LinkedIn?

By: Vicki LaBrosse

If you have not integrated [LinkedIn](#) into your marketing and sales strategy, what are you waiting for? As of September 2013, LinkedIn reported that it has more than 225 million members in over 200 countries and territories.

Since its launch in 2003, LinkedIn has diversified its business model to include other channels that seem like a logical adaptation to the application such as LinkedIn For Recruiters, For Job Seekers and For Sales Professionals.

Getting started

Think of LinkedIn as a social media platform as well as a lead-generating machine. Just as on other social media platforms, you need to be careful of what you post as what you say will be tied to your identity. The goal is to demonstrate that you are part of the community and you are there to add value rather than sell your product or services.

The key to having success on LinkedIn is to use it on a daily basis to provide valuable support to your connections and groups. While this may sound intimidating in terms of time commitment, it really only requires 10-15 minutes of your day and, as you get better at it, most likely only 5-10 minutes altogether.

Although deals won't get closed via LinkedIn, it is the perfect place to gather intelligence not only about your industry but about your colleagues, prospects, clients and companies.

Use this checklist to make sure you have the basics*, completed:

- Ensure your LinkedIn profile is complete and attractive to prospective clients.
- Grow your network by increasing the number of people with whom you are connected.
- Post useful and interesting status updates with links to helpful third-party websites, blogs and commentaries.
- Provide recommendations for other LinkedIn users where you have firsthand knowledge of their services or skills.
- Provide endorsements of skills you believe other users have, as prompted by LinkedIn when you visit their profiles.
- Participate in local business groups or niche groups.

All of the suggestions above come free with the Basic subscription to LinkedIn. There are more advanced features and plans available for the more robust users.

Different kinds of plans:

- Basic (free)
- Business (\$19.95/mo)
- Business Plus (\$39.95/mo)
- Executive (\$74.95/mo)



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Search and connect

Every time you receive an email or hang up the phone with a new professional contact, your next step should be to go and find them on LinkedIn and connect! This is where the real magic happens on LinkedIn. Not only are you more or less scratching their back, but you can then find out more about that person with a simple search and click. You can also search for their company name.

You can use the advanced search function to search for businesspeople in your local area, in your niche or both. You can go further and search for key people within specific companies or within companies of the size you prefer to approach and find the name and job title of the decision maker you wish to engage with. Some of these features come with a paid subscription, but I think you are beginning to see the payoff of having access to this information instantaneously.

InMail

This is simply a LinkedIn tool for sending messages directly to someone within LinkedIn whom you are not already connected with. Some professionals use InMail a lot like how they use their email campaign system. You can send InMail to individuals, and you can also send messages to fellow group members, even if you are not connected to them.

The unwritten rule of thumb is to not send sales promotion InMails; this is an immediate turnoff and most likely will do more damage than good.

Who's looking

LinkedIn will show you who has viewed your profile. This is important as you will notice that some of the visitors may be prospective clients; however, most will be other practitioners, recruiters, suppliers or perhaps even competition.

It is a good idea to keep your profile updated and to show activity as it is more compelling to your ideal target clients.

Building opportunity

Here are some basic tips and strategies you can employ in order to start building new business opportunities:

Connect Personally ~ Don't just hit the "connect" button, add a personal note and try to make it memorable. Even if you had an amazing conversation a week ago, someone may not remember you after a few busy days. People appreciate quality connections, so make your request to connect less automatic and more personal.

Groups ~ Start joining groups and engaging in discussions. If you don't have a blog, group discussions are a great way to demonstrate thought leadership and get attention for your personal or company brand.

Company Page Posts ~ Engage your team and encourage them to post on their pages as well as the company page. Sharing on these pages is much less expensive than paying \$2 per click to advertise on LinkedIn.

Status Updates ~ Update your business status on LinkedIn and keep your personal updates for Facebook. People who are connected to you will see your status updates. Demonstrate your knowledge and expertise as well as your company's accomplishments.

Finally

If you are on LinkedIn, you want your network to grow. You want to connect with as many people as you can because there is some serious business that can be built from these connections. If you're not taking advantage of this free resource to build your reputation and business, consider diving in as it will most likely give you the best bang for the buck when all other types of social media marketing are considered.

**Provided by www.accountingweb.com.*

About the Author

Vicki LaBrosse is media relations director with Edge Marketing, Inc. Leveraging more than 13 years of experience working in professional services industries, LaBrosse works with clients to develop and execute comprehensive marketing strategies that will help grow their business.



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