

How to Use LinkedIn for Business

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LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) has quickly become a valuable asset to many professionals, regardless of the company or vertical you work within.

It's an incredibly powerful networking tool and can also be useful from a marketing/advertising standpoint, since LinkedIn now offers paid advertising.

PROSPECTING

From a networking standpoint, LinkedIn offers an unlimited rolodex to choose from in building your own network. It closely resembles the theory of "six degrees of separation" by using the power of introductions and referrals to grow your inner circle. You will be amazed at how people will find you and how you will start to locate others.

CONNECTING

Once you have established your profile, indicating former and current employers plus schools and affiliations, the interface will then help you find people you may know. The system will continuously offer people for you to connect with that have common associations to you such as employers and schools.

Through the in-network mail you can then reach out and invite individuals into your network. Once they are in your network, you will each be updated every time one of your accounts changes or there is activity from either of you in the network, like when you update your status, join a group or answer a question.

Recruiters and human resource personnel are big users of this system to source job candidates for specific positions. They will send a note out to their "network," people they have connected with, in hopes of virally spreading the word about an open position.

This communication platform is available to all users and can go beyond recruiting, by spreading whatever important message you need/want to pass

on within your network.

You could think of it as the start of a viral marketing campaign.

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

LinkedIn works very much on a referral basis and leverages people's expertise where they can add value. There are two ways that you can establish yourself as an industry expert and provide input on subject matters related to your business. They are:

- Apply to join an existing group or establish your own group, if one does not exist for your niche or business expertise. By being active in a group, you can engage with others who have common interests and those who are looking to learn from industry experts.
- Participate in the answers forum. This is a section, which is categorized, where users can post questions and other users weigh in with responses.

Those users who contribute frequently within a certain category have special notation and are called out in the section as having the most answers. Participation in this forum can be very valuable to establishing yourself as a leader in the field, but be careful not to be perceived as self-promoting. By nature, your constant input and feedback to the forum will offer users a sense of who you are and what value you offer. Remember, it is very easy to contact someone through the LinkedIn platform, as well as for people to quickly learn more about you (by going to your profile).

Within the answers section is the ability to hyperlink to URLs of value to the question, which could be used for articles, blog posts or online tools that your company offers. Additionally, there is an opportunity to identify an Expert in your post – which is basically a public referral of someone you know.

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION

For no cost, users can establish a company profile page providing an overview of their business.

Check out the profile for my company, MoreVisibility, to see how that works.

In addition, LinkedIn offers two paid advertising options, one direct and the other via Google Adwords (they are a partner of Google, therefore are a part of the syndication network). The Google ads are done via co-per-click and are tied to your existing Google account and budget.

The direct ads offer a wide variety of targeting features, based on the individual profile information collected from users. This information proves to be valuable for advertisers who can get as granular as they like in targeting their ads, to reach the right audience (i.e., users holding a director level or higher title, in the manufacturing industry and based in the state of Texas). These options are beneficial for B-to-B advertisers who have a precise profile of their customer. LinkedIn charges advertisers on a CPM (cost per impression) basis, similar to a media buy, with incremental charges for each of the targeting options selected.

There are so many ways to use this powerful tool to enhance your business network and pipeline. The above is a good guide to get you started. With many of the recently released LinkedIn applications now offered within your account (share PPT presentations, import blog postings, reputation monitoring), it is a tool that should be increasingly relied upon by business professionals.

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