

How to Truly Connect Via LinkedIn: A Primer for all things “linking”

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One of the best things about the Internet is how one can connect, engender and initiate relationships via the available Web 2.0 tools.

One of the best ways to do this for your career is to connect using the tool LinkedIn.com.

This primer will be a great starting point for you in terms of how you can reach out to like-minded and “link-minded” people on the Internet and expand your Web footprint for the greater good of all.

What follows are some key points and things to keep in mind as you enter the world of LinkedIn, or for some of you expand what you’re already doing on LinkedIn.

In light of the current changing economic times there could not be a better opportunity to rediscover yourself and what you bring to the table as well as re-engender deeper connections to partners, peers and potential customers.

What you don’t want to do is think about LinkedIn in terms of a box where it is filed under the term “social currency.” LinkedIn is not about monetizing authentic communication, it is more about how you will initiate real connectivity and through that have more opportunities for your career growth.

If you’re still wondering what LinkedIn.com is – the best way to describe it is your virtual vitae, resume and community building tool online and just a click away.

LinkedIn Vs. Facebook: Some key differentiators to keep in mind.

LinkedIn Is Your Boardroom...Facebook is Your Playground

When I do social media training, one the key things folks ask me about is why they should use LinkedIn.com if they’re already going gangbusters on Facebook?

The key thing to remember about Facebook vs. LinkedIn.com is that Facebook is your playground and LinkedIn.com is your boardroom.

Treat LinkedIn.com as your virtual office to connect with like-minded peers, partners, customers and groups. Keep your LinkedIn.com profile shiny, clear, specific and find the groups you need to join on LinkedIn.com that will keep you in the company of the best and the brightest.

Three groups to join on LinkedIn.com no matter who you are and where you’re doing business from:

1. Your college alumni groups
2. Your hometown and surrounding geographic LinkedIn Group - like LinkedInAustin or LinkedInSeattle.
3. Your trade and association groups. This is important because it really helps you come into contact with folks who you might later be able to work with, present at a speaking event or provide peer support to.

Facebook is grand and fun and there are some fantastic marketing initiatives that are based on soft-sell that you can roll out on Facebook, but to truly serve yourself well, you also need to stay connected on LinkedIn.com and use all its functionality.

LinkedIn: Completing Your Profile

Give others the whole picture of you and your amazing work!

You will find that LinkedIn gives you access to potential peers, partners, clients, hiring entities and even sole proprietors that might want to collaborate with you. Shared communities are a very valuable way to expand your own network to a greater degree.

Key Things you Must Complete in Your Profile:

A complete profile includes:

- Your current position.
- Two past positions.
- Education.
- **Profile** summary.
- A **profile** photo.
- Specialties.
- At least two recommendations.

Make sure to cover:

- Your work background in full, with your current position included.
- Your alumni associations including colleges you went to. Special study groups or groups that you speak to.
- You want to join other groups. Think local first and then expand to groups you feel most affiliated with. If you're an author it might be a publishing group, if you're a business person in sales it might be some top selling groups or top selling insight groups.
- Clubs, volunteerism is also important to have on your profile. This aligns you with others who are "doing good and doing well" (Jim Collins) and helps you significantly identify the causes you care about.

- Use keywords for your skill sets when it comes to building your profile. Think about the terms people search on to find people in your line of work. Think of your specialties and how you can accent those within those searches as well. Every single thing you put up on LinkedIn is searchable and so keep that in mind in terms of using it for the greater good of your Web visibility.
- Always fill out the section that LinkedIn has for defining what you're interested in. There are pre-set options including job inquiries, career opportunities, but you can also put in more information to highlight further what you might want to connect with someone on.
- When you are building your profile think of good buzzwords, but also keep in mind that you want to be as transparent as possible in terms of what you offer.

RECONNECTION THROUGH LINKEDIN

Reconnect, reconnect, reconnect. Use your LinkedIn profile to connect to groups or companies with which you've previously worked. Keep in mind that over 2/3rds of job opportunities become available through networking and you're in a great position to facilitate this by keeping your connectivity with past and present career avenues.

1. *Get at least **three** references for your work* – at the very least for the latest job you've held. This is easier than you think! If you let LinkedIn build your connections for you by tapping your email service and sending out invites on your behalf then that same group of folks can also be asked to give you referrals for your work. This is important because it really gives a powerful view to anyone who might search for you on LinkedIn a great introduction to how you might benefit them.
2. *Get an up to date photo on LinkedIn.* Make sure you have a good photo for your profile – don't leave that out because the goal is to get your profile at 100% complete and LinkedIn.com will tell you how you're doing in terms of that if you look at the sidebar as you're filling in your profile. Once it says "100% complete" then you're done!
3. On technical skills make sure you list again the search terms or typical references that are used to relate to your job skills. If you are a life coach, you might want to list that as a skill in technical section, "Life Coach Entrepreneur," as an example.
4. *List your websites on your profile*, show your main one at the very least and if you have a blog you can show that as well.
5. Your public profile is what everyone will see whether they are logged into LinkedIn or not so be certain that you go through your account settings and choose what you want to show on that profile. For instance, you can keep your phone number private, or your email private or your pictures private.
6. Check your profile for any grammatical errors or spelling mistakes. Remember this is really your virtual resume and you don't want to have it read as though you did not spend a significant amount of time polishing it!

Other things you need to do on LinkedIn.com include:

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- Rewrite your short bio so that the keywords really match your best expertise and you can capitalize on organic search.
- At least once a month answer an Expert Question in your vertical, or post an Expert question to your connections. This is a fantastic edu-focus tool where you can shine and help people all at the same time.
- Update your LinkedIn status at least twice weekly.
- Make sure your blog is mirrored under your LinkedIn.com profile so if people come to your LinkedIn.com profile they also see your blog posts.

How Do People Find Me? How Do I Connect with People? And what are all these crazy invites in my in-box?

Overview

LinkedIn is all about connecting in an authentic and transparent manner. You have the power of connecting with thousands of folks, and they connecting with you as you continuously build and expand your network. You have with the free account the option of getting five introductions. What that means is you can ask your network or people in it to possibly introduce you to someone in their network that you feel you really should connect with.

Don't spend your time trying to wedge connections with people just because they are famous or have a big network, make sure that whomever you are connecting with has value and that you can offer them value in terms of the connection.

LinkedIn does not mean LINKME.

However, you can and should use your networks to search out new opportunities for job hunting. For instance you can use the LinkedIn utility for search and search on businesses or on contacts at businesses. I've had clients who wanted to send marketing collateral to a Program Events manager at a major company like IBM, Amazon, Microsoft and they find those folks on LinkedIn and reach out to them through that entity through making the right connections.

At the very least you can get the name of the person and their correct title to pro-actively send snail mail a packet about your offerings.

Another great tool for meeting new people and connecting in your arena as well as finding job opportunities is to spend some time answering "Expert Questions" in your arena and from your skillset. These are listed as options under your career verticals and once posted these questions can be answered by anyone on LinkedIn. You'd be surprised at how much you connect to new people through this authentic way of responding to a question.

In PR for instance, if I get a question about "How to Get on Oprah" – I would respond and list some good tips for getting in O Magazine or on Oprah.

If you're a life coach and someone posts a question about how to deal with job loss and really find what one wants to truly do – you might be able to send a wonderful response and highlight your knowledge base at the same time.

The key is to keep all your responses edu-focused and selfless. In other words, this is not the place for you to hard sell your services.

Also in terms of connecting with your own network through the LinkedIn option of connecting – make certain that you add a bit of personalization to the invites that LinkedIn will send out on your behalf. “I'd like to add you to my professional network on LinkedIn..” – reads a bit dry – you can spend just a small amount of time and add some authentic messaging to this and when LinkedIn is reaching out on your behalf it is in a much more personalized manner.

When you reach out for recommendations, it is also important to be accessible for people to reach out to you for recommendations. It is valuable for you to pro-actively write a couple of recommendations for people in your network through LinkedIn because it shows that you are part of the community.

Search and LinkedIn – finding the right people!

Did you know that the search tool on LinkedIn can help you find people by:

1. Company
2. Title
3. Industry
4. Interested in
5. Name – Last name
6. Keywords
7. Location – this is a wonderful tool to find people near you and find companies that might not know about your services. It's also a great way to connect with groups that you might not know about in your area.

On LinkedIn keep in mind that you don't want to ask for recommendations that are not valuable and you don't want to ghostwrite recommendations for yourself and then have others post them. Keep it authentic and you'll enjoy the experience at a much greater level.

Finally, keep your LinkedIn updates to at least a couple times weekly. You can simply go into your account, which you should do at least a couple times a week and LinkedIn asks the question, “What Are You Doing?” – simply type something in that box and pick update. This can be as simple as “reading NYTimes – PUT LINK HERE” or “working on a new speech for the Women's Conference” – remember even these updates can lead to potential clients or partners so don't put things like “Eating oatmeal” “fighting with husband”.

Now go and get LinkedIn! Find me on LinkedIn.com/NettieHartsock or at my site (www.nettiehartsock.com) – and let me know how you're doing!