

xerox



6 Ways to Maximize Your LinkedIn Profile

By Alexandra Kirkman

April 4, 2014

As the world's largest online professional network, LinkedIn boasts nearly 280 million members in over 200 countries. While a profile on the site has become a must for most, there's no real guidebook for how to present yourself and maximize the site's tools to put you in a stronger position. We asked a range of communications experts for their top tips on how to best make the site to work for you, whether you're looking to hire, find a job or promote your business.

1. When it comes to your profile, more is more. Don't be afraid to include a wealth of previous work experience.

"Many people underestimate the importance of filling out an entire profile," says Nicole Williams, career expert at LinkedIn. "To get the full benefit of the site, you really have to put yourself out there."

Williams notes that your profile is 12 times more likely to be viewed if you have more than one position listed; hiring managers may perform searches for people with, say, ten years of experience, but if your profile doesn't include information that far back, you could be missing out.

"It's essential to list all past experience showing your ability to execute and problem-solve, even if you think it's irrelevant," Williams notes.

She also recommends posting examples of your work to let it speak for itself: for example, if you are in a visual field, highlight your work by uploading a recent presentation, image, or portfolio on your profile.

2. Be strategic when replying to job posts. If you find a job that seems like a great fit, Williams recommends connecting directly to the job poster—but don't send a generic response. Study his or her career trajectory, as well as the company page and job listing, before you reach out.

"Your message should have personalized anecdotes about your experience, and highlight strong points from their own experience with the brand," she says.

"Were they quoted in an article? Did they upload a great presentation? Mention how this information helped you 'get to know' the brand and further solidified your desire for the position. It'll show you've done your homework and didn't take the easy way out by simply hitting 'apply.'"

3. Be cautious when connecting with strangers. When it comes to the annals of (digital) age-old LinkedIn questions, whether to accept connection requests from people you don't know ranks near the top of the list. Most experts say it depends on the situation.

"Considering a few things before accepting: First, is that person relevant to your business interests—a potential client, business partner, job lead, or talent for your organization? Second, does he or she share mutual contacts with you, and therefore already part of your extended business network? Finally, did the invitation come with a personal note explaining why you should connect?" says Lori Russo, managing director at PR firm Stanton Communications in Washington, D.C. If the answer to one or more of the above questions is yes, connect away.

4. Carpe diem. Williams recommends using LinkedIn's mobile apps to send connection requests, even if the person is right in front of you.

"If you were just introduced to an amazing potential client, or a like-minded professional at a conference, connecting via mobile will save you from digging through messy piles of business cards later—and also increase the likelihood that the person accepts your request."

Also, just as you would in "real" life, leverage your existing network to

grow your LinkedIn one.

“Don’t be afraid to ask for an introduction to someone on LinkedIn that you want to talk with—especially if you are looking for an informational interview about a job or career sector you’re interested in,” says J.D. Ross, communications director at the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University.

If you haven’t met or don’t know someone you’d like to connect with, or don’t have a mutual contact, Williams suggests sending an InMail.

“Compared to regular email or a cold call, it’s great because it includes information about you and your professional background,” she says.

If you have a basic LinkedIn account, you can purchase up to ten InMail credits (at \$10 each, they’re not cheap, but if you don’t get a response within 7 days, LinkedIn will credit your account). If you have a premium account and want more than your allotted number of InMails—depending on your level of premium membership, you get 3, 10, or 25 per month—you can purchase up to ten more.

5. Post frequent updates to attract the attention of recruiters and business prospects. Simply put, it pays to post updates—especially if you’re on the job hunt. “If you share once a week, you increase your chances of having your profile viewed by a recruiter tenfold,” reports Williams.

Post something that will be of interest to those in your network, such as industry news, or corporate blog posts sharing you or your company’s point of view on a timely issue—and don’t make it all about you.

“Avoid braggadocian behavior,” advises Jacques Hart, CEO of Roar Media, a public relations firm in Miami. “The key is to engage with your audience and bring value to them, not to boast about how many awards you’ve won, or new clients you’ve added.”

A good rule of thumb? “Follow the 80/20 rule,” says Susan Shelby, president of Boston-based Rhino Public Relations, who speaks frequently on the topic of utilizing LinkedIn for businesses. “Eighty

percent of your posts should be about other people and topics; 20% should be about yourself.”

6. Create a Company Page to raise your corporate profile. LinkedIn Company Pages are valuable tools, especially if you’re a business owner—more than 3 million companies currently have them. Be sure to include a comprehensive description of your business, products, and services.

“People have stopped searching the Yellow Pages and are now turning to online resources,” says Williams. “You want to make it as easy as possible for people — whether they’re recruiters, vendors, potential clients or current customers – to clearly understand your business and goals.”

Chip Garner, a vice president of digital strategies at New York PR powerhouse Rubenstein Communications, suggests optimizing the page with photos and videos that are consistent with the look and feel of your business’ website—but don’t mirror it. “For example, upload a different marketing video on LinkedIn than your corporate website, and change up the LinkedIn visual assets on a regular basis,” he says. “This gives visitors a reason to come back and see what’s new.”

Garner also recommends including posts targeted to specific audiences in your update mix to deepen engagement with your company page; updates can be customized by company size, seniority, and other criteria.

“Sharing targeted updates with specific groups helps make sure your message is not lost in the chatter,” he says.