

BUILDING A LINKEDIN PROFILE

Explore the social media outlet's multiple features to help enhance your profile for a more professional presentation

By Tanya Venegas, MBA, MHM

Q. I am thinking about making a career move. What is the best way I can use LinkedIn to make possible job connections? I have a basic profile, but haven't really used any of the other features.

A. Since LinkedIn started back in 2003, this social networking site has developed multiple features which are beneficial to job seekers. According to the LinkedIn web site, at the time this article is being written, there are 332 million members on LinkedIn. Think about the potential of reaching out to these individuals. For this very reason, you have to make sure you put forth your best effort in your profile and everything else you post on LinkedIn. The following will outline some of the best ways to set yourself apart from your peers while using LinkedIn.

Profile Updates

First of all, keep your profile and summary updated. The summary is an attention grabber and should incorporate several previous positions and a clear message about you. Make sure your summary includes key words related to the position you want to acquire so that your name comes up when potential employers are searching LinkedIn. The summary should be two to three paragraphs long and include your e-mail address and phone number at the end.



If you are making a bunch of changes to your profile in preparation to apply for jobs, before you get started, make sure you turn off profile updates. It is one thing to add a recent certification or project, but if you are updating your profile to include projects you have done over the last five years, individuals do not want to be inundated with multiple updates. In addition, your current employer may become suspicious. You can turn off updates by changing your privacy settings.

What should be included in your profile? Nearly everything related to your professional career can be included in your LinkedIn profile. This list should include former employers, schools, projects, special awards and any other type of recognition you have received relevant to your profession. A good rule is to include the details on any positions or accolades you received in the last seven to 10 years. Unlike printed resumés, there is not a limit to the amount of information you can include on your LinkedIn profile. This allows you to provide a complete picture of your career to possible employers. You can also include videos or links to projects you have completed for examples of your work.

Remember to always keep your profile updated when you achieve a new position, complete a major side project or receive a special award or recognition. Your profile is like your own personal brochure, should point out all of your accomplishments and set you apart from the rest of your peers. Finally, make sure your profile is public so that people can search for you and examine your career experience.

Tanya Venegas, MBA, MHM (tanya.venegas@hftp.org) is executive director and HFTP Fellow at the HFTP Americas Research Center. She is a regular contributor to *The Bottomline* and speaker at HFTP educational events.

Profile Pictures

It is important to include a picture on your LinkedIn profile. Researchers say that a profile is 14 times more likely to be viewed if you have a picture. It doesn't necessarily need to be a headshot taken by a professional photographer, but one that casts you in a professional manner. If you have the time and money, a professional headshot typically costs around \$250 and is well worth the expense for a professionally composed photograph to use on LinkedIn, in conference programs and in other professional publications.

Invitations and Connections

There are some basic rules you should follow when making connections using LinkedIn. There are really two divisions of thought: make as many connections as you can or only send connection requests to people you know. Most professionals agree that you should only send invitations to connect to people you know or have a connection to through professional settings. Treat connections in the virtual world like you would in the "real" world. When meeting someone at a conference, you wouldn't immediately ask them for a job. The same goes in the virtual realm. Build rapport with the person first, join groups, post comments on their postings, etc. After a while, you can approach the subject. It may take some time, but it will be worth the effort.

When you are ready to make connections, personalize the invitations. Do not use the standard "I'd like to add you to my professional network." As mentioned earlier, most professionals do not want to make random connections; therefore, make sure you have a good reason to connect with someone and be able to defend that reason if needed. Also, do not feel obligated to connect with everyone that sends you an invitation. Individuals are not notified when they are rejected, but if there is not a legitimate reason to be connected, then their feelings shouldn't be hurt.

A good piece of advice, if you meet someone at a conference: wait until you are back in the office to connect. There is one primary reason for this: they are out of the office as well. What is the likelihood that an individual will go through your profile while they are out of town? Probably pretty slim; but, if you wait until they return to their office, then they are more likely to look over your profile when they receive the invitation.

Messages

You need to treat LinkedIn messages with the same concern as work e-mails. Check your notifications and make sure your settings are correct. E-mail notifications can be sent individually as they are received, in a weekly digest, or no e-mail notifications. Respond to messages in a timely manner and make sure you are checking them on a regular basis.



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Posting Content

One of the best ways to get noticed is by posting content in LinkedIn groups. You can post articles about the industry which will solicit comments and interactions of people with similar interests. Secondly, you can post comments in discussions on LinkedIn. A thoughtful comment could prompt a potential employer to view your profile. Even something as simple as telling a connection congratulations on a new position or a career milestone may get you noticed. Again, you most likely do not want your current boss to know all of your activity when it comes to groups and networking, so visit your privacy settings to hide your activity in these groups.

Other Tips

The following are various other tips that can help get you noticed using LinkedIn.

- **Recommendations:** Most people indicate that recommendations can be very helpful when on the job hunt. A 360 degree recommendation including managers, peers and clients provides an excellent look at your work capabilities. It is also important to provide recommendations and meaningful endorsements for others as well.
- **LinkedIn URL:** If you are interested, you can personalize your LinkedIn URL. If you look under your picture

in your profile you will see your LinkedIn URL. You can click to the right of the provided URL and it will give you an option to create your custom URL. This URL can be included in your e-mail signature or on your business cards.

- **Keep Your Profile Active:** Not only is it important to keep your profile updated, but you should also be active on LinkedIn. Some simple ways to do this are to make comments on posts, post articles, make recommendations and endorsements, etc. Even after you have landed a new position, keep working on your LinkedIn profile. You never know what new opportunities may come your way.
- **Follow Companies and Groups:** Follow companies you would like to work for to learn about their organization. This will put you ahead of the game if you land an interview or meet someone from these potential employers. Following groups also allows you to learn about the industry and make important connections.

To sum up, one of the most important pieces of posting anything on LinkedIn is proofreading. You can have the best experience, but if you have a misspelled or misused word, it is difficult for potential employers or clients to look past your mistakes. ■

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