Beginners’ Guide to LinkedIn

Where to start marketing your business on LinkedIn

A Simple Guide
Introduction

LinkedIn has often been referred to as ‘Facebook for Professionals’ which is not necessarily accurate. However, with 300 million users and two new accounts made every second, can you really afford not to be using LinkedIn?

LinkedIn’s power lies in the ability to build and nurture a robust professional network, whilst you establish yourself as a thought leader as well as learning from other industry experts.

Whether or not you are already familiar with LinkedIn, this guide will help you make sure you are getting the most out of the platform, for yourself and for your business.

The Professor

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8 Steps to an All Star Profile

Your profile is arguably one of the most important aspects of LinkedIn. Whether or not you are using the platform to market your business or to find a job, making sure your profile is up to scratch should be the first item on your to do list.

When planning your LinkedIn profile, it’s a good idea to work out what your goal is. Are you looking for a job? Are you looking to generate sales leads? Determining what you want from LinkedIn before you start will help you tailor your profile to the correct audience.
1 – Photograph

Profiles with photographs are 11 times more likely to be viewed. Having a photograph makes you appear more credible as people like to put a face to a name and see who they are talking to.

When deciding on a photograph to use, make sure you can be seen clearly and are not doing something in the photograph that would not be seen as professional. A head and shoulders shot with a plain background works well for most. Keep it simple.

2 – Name

Use your full name. No exceptions. No additions. No abbreviations. Your name.

This may sound obvious, but countless LinkedIn users add mobile numbers to their names, or simply have their first name and an initial. The belief is that this will get them more clicks, however this is not actually true. If you have additional, unnecessary information after your name, LinkedIn will categorise you incorrectly, meaning it will be harder for anyone to find you. So keep it simple and stick to your name.

3 – Headline

Sitting under your full name is your professional headline which is not just a place to display your job title; it is a good place to help build your personal brand by altering it to something that may be more appealing to prospective clients or employers. It is a good idea to keep it short, sweet and still have your job title in there should a client seek you out via LinkedIn.
4 – Summary

The summary is potentially one of the most important parts of your profile. It is an ideal place to highlight what you are really good at, or to talk about what your business is really good at. You have 2000 characters, so it’s a good idea to use those wisely to convince people why they should do business with you. Avoid writing in the third person, or using buzzwords (because everyone uses buzzwords). Use the words that you would use should you find yourself talking to someone face to face, and above all, be honest. It can also be a good idea to include something personal; although LinkedIn is a professional platform, we are all still human.

5 – Professional Experience

Under professional experience there will be a chronological list of the companies you worked for and what you did while you were there. It is a good idea to keep these brief and to the point. If you are describing your own business then it’s a good idea to talk about your input to the growth of the business. Be specific, brief, and above all, be honest.

While you are outlining your professional experience, use keywords to describe the key experiences and successes you have achieved, in a format that is easy to read, such as bullet points. Tailor your whole profile to your professional experiences only, such as internships or work experience.

6 – Additional Information

Towards the bottom of your profile, you will find a section marked ‘additional information’ which is where you can put your personal interests, how to contact you and any personal details such as your date of birth, or anniversary date. This area is probably the one area that is rarely filled out, but it can be useful especially for fitting in keywords.
7 – Optimise your profile

A big benefit of LinkedIn is that if you search for yourself on Google it should show your LinkedIn profile first as LinkedIn is indexed by major search engines. This has the potential to put you in front of a huge audience so it is a good idea to make sure your profile looks great when it shows up.

To make sure potential clients or employers can find you on LinkedIn, you need to be using the right key words.

Remember that people will search differently on Google than they will on LinkedIn. On Google, they will generally be searching for information and therefore will be more likely to type in questions. When it comes to LinkedIn, however, they are more likely to be looking for a particular product or service, or someone in a certain position and will search for specific terms.

8 – Ask for recommendations

Recommendations are powerful ways to showcase your expertise through a colleague’s eye and are really effective on your profile. When requesting recommendations, it’s a good idea not to send the generic request message that LinkedIn generates for you, as this is impersonal. Instead, draft a personal message, including some of the projects that you worked on with that particular person to jog their memory and make the task a little easier for you.

If you would like to offer a reciprocal recommendation, it is a good idea to leave the actual posting of the recommendation for a while after yours has been posted, as it will give the appearance that the recommendations were purely so that you could get one in return.

It is also worth pointing out that recommendations should only be requested from people that you know very well, as you are more likely to receive a useful recommendation.
Going forward:
Now your profile is all set up, you can set about growing your network and gaining those all important connections!
Building your connections:

Once you have an all star LinkedIn profile, the next step is to find people you know on the platform. For LinkedIn to say that your profile is 100% complete, one of the requirements is at least 50 connections. That might sound like a lot, but really it isn’t! Plus, LinkedIn’s search feature makes it pretty easy to find people you know professionally.

First thing’s first, find the people you already know by using the search bar, typing in their name, and clicking the connect button next to their name. LinkedIn will ask how you know this person and give you a series of options, as well as a message that you can send to them. It can be a good idea to personalise the message rather than using the generic one.

Once you have a few connections, LinkedIn’s algorithms will start coming into play, telling you people it thinks you may know. LinkedIn sorts people in degrees of connections, so people you are connected to become your 1st degree connections. People who are connected to your 1st degree connections but not to you are 2nd degree connections and then the next step removed are referred to as your 3rd degree connections.

You could also decide to connect your email list to your LinkedIn profile to find additional contacts. In order to do this, you just need to head to ‘import contacts’ and allow access to your contacts. It is worth being aware that if you are importing from an account such as Gmail, this will most likely produce a huge list of contacts as Gmail saves every email address you have ever interacted with.
Groups:

LinkedIn groups are a great place to share expertise, content and ask for advice from industry experts as well as network with others that share your interests. One of the main reasons for joining LinkedIn is to improve your online visibility; joining groups and interacting with others within them is one of the best ways to achieve visibility, as well as growing your network. If you are an active member within a group and become a top contributor, your name will appear on the home page for all members to see.

To find groups that you will find interesting, you can use LinkedIn’s search tool, searching for a particular keyword or term, toggling the menu on the left hand side and clicking on ‘groups’. LinkedIn will then pull together a list of relevant groups for you to look through and find ones relevant to you.

LinkedIn does impose a maximum number of 50 groups that you are able to join, so do not join every group you see and instead think about where your target audience is likely to be, as well as where you can learn valuable tips from experts in your own field and establish yourself as an authority.

It is important to engage within the groups rather than just posting your own content. There is the option to mark posts as ‘spam’ which will be done far quicker than you think, and this will mean that your posts will be monitored for a period of time before you receive free reign to post again. Another point to remember is the groups are not places to sell, they are places to converse and share best practice, so bear that in mind whenever you post in a group or comment on a discussion.

Once you are familiar with group functions you may decide to make your own group. This will mean that you are the group owner, but you can also appoint group managers and moderators who will be responsible for supervising discussions or any subgroups that you may have.
Companies:

Just as on Facebook, LinkedIn has the opportunity for you to create a company page, which people will be able to follow in order to keep up to date with said company’s products and services.

Many companies also advertise their jobs through their company pages and encourage potential applicants to apply through LinkedIn.

If you would like to create a company page, you need to meet a specific set of requirements set out by LinkedIn:

- You must have a personal profile
- You must have completed or a nearly complete profile (minimum requirement is intermediate)
- You must have a certain number of 1st degree connections
- You must have your company and position listed in the ‘Experience’ section on your profile
- Your company email address is added and confirmed on your account
- Your company’s email domain is unique and isn’t being used for an existing company page. Email addresses such as gmail.com or yahoo.com are not unique and therefore cannot be used.

An important point is that an email domain can only be used once to create a company page, therefore, if yours has already been used, LinkedIn will suggest that you create a group instead.

When creating your company page, make sure that you include keywords that your target audience are likely to use to search for the products and services that your company provides, so that they will be able to find you in the search results. Setting up a company page is quite simple and all you will need to do is fill out the information required including a description of the company, the website, when the company was founded and so on.
Once you have built your company page and are satisfied with the results, invite your connections to follow your company page. Ensure that you post updates regularly (although not too regularly, or people will unfollow) and promote your company page outside of LinkedIn. Make sure you add the page to your email signature, on your website and on any communication that you send out.
Jobs:

One of the most valuable features of LinkedIn is its job search and recruitment tools. More and more companies are posting vacancies on LinkedIn and encouraging candidates to apply through the platform due to its credibility and ease of use.

LinkedIn charges a one off fee of £233.64 (inclusive of VAT) for a month long job posting and all you need to do is fill in the details and away you go. People can then apply for the job through LinkedIn, sending their profile as a CV and then attaching their CV as well. This job listing includes a guaranteed 10 applicants too.
Updates:

Very much like Facebook and Twitter, you can post updates to your LinkedIn profile which will then appear in your connections’ home feeds. However, the types of updates suitable for LinkedIn are very different to the ones you may post on Facebook and Twitter, given the professional and formal nature of the platform. It is wise to keep your updates industry and professionally focused, so bear this in mind if you are trying to increase engagement with your community.

There is no right and wrong number of times to post updates on LinkedIn, but we would suggest a minimum of twice a week, and a maximum of five times per week. Any more and you risk annoying your connections, especially given that LinkedIn is not a platform that people will spend all day, every day on.

You can also link your Twitter profile to your LinkedIn account, meaning that when you post to Twitter, it will automatically post the same update to LinkedIn. However, we would suggest not connecting the two platforms, as each require a different type of update and serve different purposes. If you are looking for a tool that can cross post to different networks in order to save yourself time with your social media activity, we suggest tools such as Buffer, where you are able to tailor the update to the platform you are sending it to.
Publishing:

One of LinkedIn’s new features is the ability for you to publish posts which is incredibly useful when growing your personal brand and establishing yourself as an expert in your field.

Posts that you publish on LinkedIn should be around 500 words or longer and of a professional nature, in line with the platform itself. If you would like to publish a post, all you need to do is click on the pencil icon on the right hand side of where you share your updates and this will take you through to a page where you can publish your post.

Once you have published a post, share it out across your other social networks as people do not have to be your connection in order to view the post. People are also able to follow you without being connected to you, meaning they can keep up to date with the posts that you publish, should they find them useful.
Conclusion:

When it comes to professional social media platforms, it doesn’t really get any better than LinkedIn. More tools are being added every day, such as the ability to publish, tag people and companies in comments and updates and sales negotiator. LinkedIn is a free platform to use, although there is the ability to upgrade to paid for services which open up more opportunities to grow your business. However, when you are just getting started, the free version is probably enough to get you going.

So there we have it; a beginner’s guide to LinkedIn. This should be enough to get you off the ground with the platform, but if you want to know more then you are in luck. Coming soon will be the PhD in LinkedIn to give you everything you need to know to grow your network, authority and business!