

GET THE BASICS RIGHT!

A GUIDE TO USING LINKEDIN EFFECTIVELY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

By Marie Allen of Web Clarity

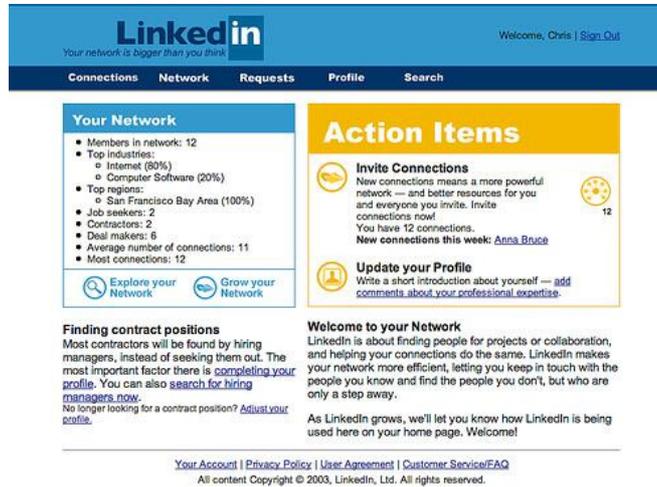
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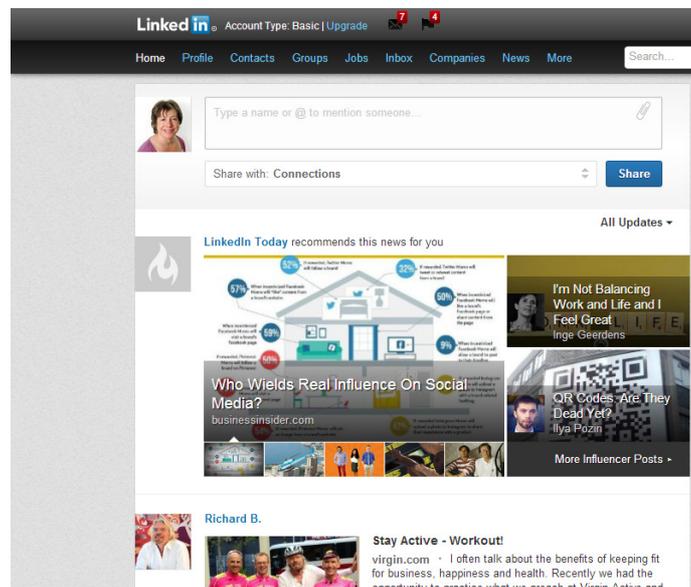
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Thank you!

LinkedIn was 10 years old last year. This is how its homepage looked back in 2003. Quaint isn't it?



Kind of different now with images and lots of new Facebook-like features



Whatever you think of social media, LinkedIn is the one social media tool that everyone in business uses. But most people just skim the surface of LinkedIn's possibilities for connecting with people and for promoting what they have to offer.

In this quick guide I go through the basics of LinkedIn, and I also highlight some cool features that not many people know about, but which will really change the results you see from your use of LinkedIn. (I'm guessing you're not seeing many results right now, but just feel that you need to be on there 'cos everyone else is!)

For instance, did you know that you can add a video to your profile? Keep reading for lots more insider tips!

LINKEDIN IS THE FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS



Construction worker laying foundations

Your LinkedIn profile is the foundation stone for all your social media activity

Your LinkedIn profile is the place people look to find out about you.

So get the basics right on LinkedIn before you delve into all the other social media channels.

Follow the advice in this guide on how to use LinkedIn effectively, and this will give you the confidence to start showcasing your business on Twitter, Facebook and all the rest.

CREATE THE PERFECT LINKEDIN PROFILE

So, let's start at the beginning by creating a LinkedIn Profile that gives the best possible impression of you and what you do.

To edit your profile click on Profile, Edit and then click on the pencil icon for the section you wish to edit.

HEADLINE

The first thing you need to do is to come up with an interesting headline or job title. This appears prominently whenever you crop up in a LinkedIn search and whenever you are mentioned on LinkedIn. It also appears in Google if your name is searched there, so it needs to say something special, not just Accountant or Managing Director.

Think about what you say when you introduce yourself at a networking event. Also, think of the keywords people will be using in LinkedIn to find someone offering your service or product. Then use these keywords in your headline so that your name gets picked up in those searches. But don't stuff it with too many keywords!

Your headline needs to be easy to read and understand as well as searchable. The best way of doing this is to describe your role and then add a tagline explaining what's special about you.

For example: Accountant providing expert, friendly, affordable tax advice to SME's

Business coach helping small business owners set realistic goals and get results

You have 140 characters for your headline. Make the most of them!

And make sure you include at least two keywords so that you maximise your chances of being picked up in searches.

The other really important part of your headline piece is your photo. Use a professional headshot, not an edited holiday snapshot or your old company ID photo!

CONTACT INFO

This is where you add your phone, email and website details.

You can include not just one but **three** website links, so use these to drive your contacts to the web pages you want them to visit.

For example, as well as your home page, include the web page for your most popular service or product, or your newsletter sign-up web page or your free opt-in offer page.

If you use Twitter for business include your Twitter name here also.

BACKGROUND

The Background part of your profile contains a number of sections which can be moved around so that you can get them in the best order for you. The sections are:

- Summary
- Experience
- Education
- Publications
- Skills and Expertise
- Courses
- Additional Information

It is probably best to place your Summary at the top but then you can move the sections around (using the arrows on the right hand side of each section) as suits you.

Your summary should include an overview of your skills. It is a good idea to present these as a list, so that it is easy for people to scan. Use your keywords again here so that you get picked up in relevant searches.

With your header and summary section complete, you now have the opportunity to describe yourself in more detail.

You might want to have recommendations at the top, and education at the bottom. If you have published a book you might want that section near the top. Move the sections around to get them in the best order for you.

Use Case Studies to show what you have done, or tell a (short) interesting story. Keep the information relevant to your current business and relate how the skills and experience you have gained over the years apply to what you are doing now and how you help people in your current role.

HOT OFF THE PRESS!!

LINKEDIN PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

LinkedIn has recently rolled out a new feature whereby you can add links to your profile so you can showcase a video, images, documents and presentations. This is called the LinkedIn Professional Portfolio.

When you have the Professional Portfolio, a square box with a plus sign in it will appear next to the pencil (edit) icon for the Summary, Experience and Education sections of your profile. Click on this and then select either Add a Link, and type in or paste the link you want to add, or Upload a File and select the file you want to upload from your desktop.

CONNECTING

Now you've got a great profile set up you can start connecting!

To add someone as a LinkedIn connection just type in their name in the search box and send them an invitation to connect. If you don't know them personally you will need to enter their email address before sending the invitation.

You can also use the Add Connections feature under the Network tab. This will search your email address lists for potential connections.

It is good practice to go through all those business cards you collect at networking events and invite them to connect with you. Add a personal note to your invite to show that you really are interested in them.

Connect with people even if they are not directly relevant to your business. You might be able to recommend them to others, or they might recommend you to people they know.

Did You Know?

You can remove a connection without them knowing. Select Remove Connections. They will not be notified about this. If you want to add them back later though, you will have to send them an “invitation to connect” again.

NINJA TIP

You can **tag** your connections to separate them into distinct groups. This is really useful if you want to send different messages to different types of connection. (Note: there is a 50 person limit on the number that can be sent a message. But you can get around this by dividing people into two or more tag groups if you need to.)

Click on Contacts, under the Network tab, and you will see a list of all your connections. Click on a name to tag it. Type in your category or “tag” name, e.g. photographers , in the box. Subsequently this tag will appear as an option when you click on other connections’ names.

Other useful tags include networking groups and location.

This is a manual task that takes a little time but it is well worth it if you know that you can make effective use of it. For example, if you want to target a particular type of connection (e.g. by location, profession, existing client, potential client) with a new service or product in a more personal and focussed way.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS

LinkedIn recently introduced Endorsements alongside Recommendations. Endorsements are quick and easy to provide, but they are not generally as highly valued as a written recommendation. It is definitely worth requesting recommendations from clients, ideally immediately after a successful piece of work, before the warm glow wears off!

Because LinkedIn provides a standard format for providing recommendations many people find them the easiest way to ask for a recommendation. However, if you want to, you can change the wording of the LinkedIn request asking for more specific feedback if you want a particular thing mentioned.

LinkedIn recommendations can be copied across to your website, to emails etc. so don't just leave them sitting in LinkedIn. Spread them around! Website visitors love to see recommendations and testimonials. They give a sense of trust and security. Sprinkle them liberally throughout your website. Use them in your sales letters and email marketing too.

Remember to give recommendations as well as asking for them! In the Recommendations section you can choose a contact's name and write some nice words about them. Guaranteed to win you friends!

STATUS UPDATES

A Status Update is the way you can share your latest news with your connections. They are not used as widely as Facebook posts and tweets. In fact many LinkedIn users don't seem to use them at all!

So seize this opportunity to let your connections know what is happening in your business. If you write a blog or send an e-newsletter put this in a status update with a link. Share news or information that may be of value to your connections. You can share interesting articles or blogs. Just add a comment to explain why you think people should read it. But don't use the status update as an advertising tool. People will soon switch off if you do. See it as a way of sharing your expertise so that you come to be seen as the "go to" person for your specialism.

NINJA TIP

Add an image to your status update to make it stand out from the standard updates. An image makes your update look more professional and gives it added zing!

(Always make sure that you have the right to use an image. You can purchase images at very reasonable cost from websites such as shutterstock.com and istockphoto.com)

Take the time to look at your LinkedIn news every day and comment on other people's updates. Or if you haven't time to comment, just tick the Like box for

something you have found of interest. Comments and Likes are fed back to the person who posted the update so doing this will increase your visibility and deepen your engagement with your connections.

If you have a connection who is annoying you with too many pointless or salesy updates, click on the Hide button, which appears top right when you hover over their update, and their updates will no longer appear in your news feed.

REMEMBER even people who don't use LinkedIn regularly normally receive get a **weekly digest email** of LinkedIn news. So a LinkedIn status update actually provides two ways of reaching your target audience. The more clicks, comments and Likes your updates get the more likely they are to be included in digest emails.

GROUPS

Groups are another really useful feature on LinkedIn. They appear under the Interests tab.

Do a Search for groups that are relevant to your business area and select a few to join and get involved with. Groups are a great way of keeping up with industry news and, by helping with questions and problems within the group, you again get yourself known as an expert in your subject area.

Networking LinkedIn groups can work really well too as an arena where you can share information and get support and advice from fellow group members.

SEARCH

LinkedIn Search is not just the preserve of headhunters and recruitment agencies! You can use Search too - to find suppliers, joint venture partners and clients.

The keyword tool in Advanced Search can be used to gather the details of people in a particular industry or location, or you can find people at a particular level in an organisation. The paid version of LinkedIn gives you even more options here.

I hope this guide has given you some ideas for making more effective use of LinkedIn in your business.

LinkedIn gives you the foundations for building successful business relationships. Then, it's up to you to get results from it in the real world.

Good luck! And let me know how you get on.

About Marie

I have worked in Information Technology for over 20 years. I looked after Computer Operational things at Esso for 15 years and then got involved with websites as a User Experience Consultant at Progenit, working with blue-chip companies, including Sainsburys and Dyson.

I set up Web Clarity in 2011, combining my User Experience expertise with my love of writing, to help business owners create and maintain engaging websites that bring them new clients on a consistent basis.

As a qualified Online Copywriter, I write compelling content specifically for websites, and I help businesses with their other online communications including email marketing, blogs and social media.

I take the time to get to know the businesses I work with really well, so that I understand what they are about and can promote their services or products in a way that is appropriate for them and totally relevant to their target market. No bland sales messages, but focussed communications that are individual, sometimes quirky(!) and always memorable.

I also advise businesses on which types of online communication (email marketing, blog, Twitter, LinkedIn etc.) are best for them, and how to use them successfully, so they don't waste time and money on things that are not going to help their business grow.

To learn more about me visit my website:

webclarity.co.uk

You can follow me on Twitter [here](#)

OR

Connect with me on LinkedIn [here](#)