

## The Missing Link

### You have a LinkedIn profile. Now what?

By Sharon Berman

If you're like many of your peers, you know someone who already has a profile on LinkedIn, the social networking site geared toward professionals. You may even have a LinkedIn profile, but are wondering how to use LinkedIn as a rainmaking tool.

The purpose of social professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, is no different than any other kind of professional networking: It's to build long lasting relationships.

You're looking to identify and connect with those people whom it makes sense to build a relationship with, but who may not be within your existing circle of professional contacts. You can expand your network of contacts by pinpointing those people in your existing circle who are also in the network of someone you'd like to get to know further.

While marketing may be about relationships, it's also a numbers game. You have to cull through many potential contacts to find the ones with real and potentially profitable fit. Leveraging your existing network's network of contacts on LinkedIn exponentially increases the number of potential business contacts you can have and develop.

Social networking is not a magic marketing bullet. It's another element in the mix of tactics you want to consider for your marketing, such as your website, speaking, writing, etc. However, like other tactics, you'll need to decide where it fits in your strategic priorities, and how much time to devote to it. Now is the time to explore its potential, and plant your social networking flag.



What can you do with LinkedIn? Here's an array of possibilities.

You can expand your network; you can do research on target clients or opposing counsel; you can reconnect with colleagues; you can find people who can introduce you to the people you'd like to meet; you can join groups of users who share similar interests; you can recruit; you can look for a new position; you can send regular daily updates about what you're working on -- which is a powerful way to alert your existing contacts of services you offer that they may not know about. Similarly, as your existing contacts add new contacts, you're alerted by daily updates, opening all sorts of possibilities to monitor your colleagues and competitors. Every time one of your contacts edits his or her profile, you're given notice, and the same type of notice is given to your contacts when you update your profile.

If you are already a member of LinkedIn, begin by first critically revisiting your own profile. Often, profiles are hastily posted without a lot of thought, and without a defined goal. What you say, and how you say it will

make a world of difference in your success on the service. LinkedIn keeps track for you in terms of how complete your profile is. The system encourages you to make it as complete as possible, which is to your benefit, so that you are all the more searchable, and more importantly, findable.

You are allowed upwards of 2,000 characters, including spaces, in your main profile. Make the most of the room by strategically describing your services and offerings. Think about keywords and phrases that prospects would use to search for someone in your practice area, then work them into your profile. Continue by revisiting the balance of your profile, keeping in mind what you want other professionals to know about what you do, and the search terms they might use. If you have a standalone blog, you can link it to your profile page to expand your content.

Judiciously building your network on LinkedIn is very important because following the six degrees of separation, every connection you add expands those you can potentially connect with, and who can connect with you. Be cautious because the whole purpose is to make valuable connections, but that goes both ways. You don't want to

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## Missing Link *(continued)*

add anyone to your network if you wouldn't feel comfortable making an introduction for them to someone who trusts you.

Joining groups is another way to extend your network and be visible on LinkedIn. In the box at the top of the screen where it says "search people," there's a pull-down menu to search groups, companies, etc. There is a myriad of groups covering every possible practice area, and you don't have to be talking only to other professionals in your field. But to maximize the return for you, you have to be visible. One way to do this is to post or answer discussion questions and participate in the conversation.

If you don't find a LinkedIn group that addresses a particular area you're involved in, consider opening your own group, and then inviting appropriate contacts to join. They will then invite their own appropriate contact to join, as well. The profile of every member is available to every other group member, and that's a powerful basis to suggest direct linking.

You can also maintain visibility by keeping your profile up-to-date and updating it often, especially by responding to the "What Are You Working On" box. Everyone who views your profile will see your response to this question, and everyone in your network will get an update.

On LinkedIn, the system automatically determines who are the contacts of your contacts. Where the system says that a person is a "2<sup>nd</sup>" it means that you are connected to that person by someone in your group who

knows them. The "3<sup>rd</sup>" means that you are connected to someone who knows someone who knows them. As you expand your linkage, your 2<sup>nd</sup> level contacts can grow exponentially.

LinkedIn will show you contacts up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> level, meaning it will show you the names of the people who know the person you want to know. If someone in your network knows someone (Level 2) who knows someone (Level 3) who knows your contact, you will not see who those people are at the third level. You will have to approach someone you know to see who is willing to approach someone they know to make an introduction to the person you'd like to meet.

So how do you use LinkedIn to get introduced to someone in your target market? For example, let's say you want to talk with the general counsel of a target company about doing an in-house MCLE presentation. Perhaps you've already tried a letter or an e-mail, but no response. You could drop it there, or you can check to see if the GC is on LinkedIn. If the GC is a LinkedIn member, but not in your extended network, you can send an InMail – an e-mail through LinkedIn -- directly to the GC. He or she may still not respond, but it's another channel of trying to reach someone.

If the GC is not on LinkedIn, other professionals from the company may have a profile. One of the contacts could be in your network's network, or even one degree further removed, and you can tell them about your presentation and why it could be useful for the GC and ask for an introduction. The

GC may or may not be interested, but may be more likely to pay attention because of the introduction.

Let's say you have a meeting with a potential client, and you've done your due diligence on the company, but want to find out more about your contact in particular. If someone in your extended network knows that person, perhaps they'd be willing to give you a heads up on the person's likes, dislikes, etc. -- information that might help you make a better connection.

No discussion of social networking is complete without the subject of privacy. You can select different degrees of privacy on most social networking sites, such as LinkedIn. For example, you can choose whether anyone viewing your profile can also view your network. Among other selections, you can also choose whether you're identified by name when you view someone else's profile. Like all networking sites generally accessible to the public, remember that what you write can be seen by your friends, and your competitors. Consider anything you post as public information.

There's a lot of potential in social networks, and users are pushing the envelope every day. Social networking is here to stay. So plant your flag, show you're in the know and grab the opportunity to lead. ■

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