

LinkedIn Etiquette for Agriculture Producers

By Cari Rincker

LinkedIn can be a powerful online networking site to create a professional brand and network with others in your field. It is a great way to advertise your farm, get a job in the agriculture industry, and build a professional network. However, if done incorrectly, your LinkedIn activity could harm your professional reputation. The purpose of this article is to briefly discuss LinkedIn etiquette.

The Do's

Do put up a (current) profile picture. A professionally done headshot is preferred, but not necessary. The photo should be a headshot and should look like you. Do feel free to use a photograph with a cowboy hat if you wear one at professional events.

Do complete your profile. Your profile tells your readers about you and is a direct reflection of your professional brand. Your employment history should include no more than the last ten years. Keep your profile up-to-date and don't link to websites that are out-of-date.

Do connect with people you know. Do link with people you know in real-life or have built an online relationship with. Don't be afraid to connect with your "real-world" friends. As a rule of thumb, feel comfortable connecting to anybody that you would exchange a business card with.

Do join groups that interest you. I suggest editing the email options for the groups (e.g., daily digests, individual emails, or no emails). Many people find discussion groups to be an excellent resource and networking opportunity.

Do link your Twitter account(s) to LinkedIn. However, don't send all of your tweets to LinkedIn – be selective.

Do bring in your blog feed into LinkedIn. There are handy LinkedIn applications for several blog platforms (e.g., Wordpress, Typepad) that will automatically pull your blog feed into your stream.

Do recommend respected colleagues. When doing so, keep the recommendations professional. Recommend colleagues without expecting reciprocity.

Do respond to LinkedIn emails like a typical email. People do use LinkedIn as a way to communicate with their professional contacts. Make sure to timely respond to these emails. Make sure to check your email settings so ensure timely notification of receipt.

Do download the LinkedIn application on your smartphone. Using the application makes it easy to manage your account and connection requests on the go. Some allow contact information to synch to the contacts on your phone.

Do spell-check and use proper grammar. Poor spelling and grammar can put you in a negative light.

The Don't's

Don't become an invitation spammer. Don't use the canned LinkedIn invitation if there is a chance that person will not remember you. Tell the potential connection where you met (*e.g.*, NCBA Annual Convention and Trade Show, Illini Elite Private Treaty Sale) or how you know them (*e.g.*, both members of New York Farm Bureau or part of the #AgChat community on Twitter).

Don't post anything that you wouldn't feel comfortable with your employer, client or customer seeing. Don't be afraid to note personal information about yourself such as hobbies and interests – it gives you personality. However, make sure it gives depth to your professional image.

Don't feel pressured to accept every invitation you receive. Beware of LinkedIn spammers. Only link to those people that you would like a professional connection to. Don't be overly concerned about numbers.

Don't confuse LinkedIn with other social networking websites. Use LinkedIn for what it is for – professional networking. LinkedIn is different than Twitter, Facebook, Quora, and YouTube.

Don't ask people for recommendations that do not know you very well. Only reach out to people that know you and have something positive to say about you. Don't make people feel obligated to give you a recommendation. And don't take it personally if people do not wish to give you a recommendation.

Don't overuse punctuation marks!!! or curse &*\$%#. It looks unprofessional.

Don't stalk people on LinkedIn. LinkedIn has a function that shows people who viewed their profile. LinkedIn is not the place to secretly online stalk people on a daily basis. That is what Facebook and Twitter are for.

Don't lie. Make sure the information that you put on your profile is truthful. Lies always come back to bite you.

For more information, find me on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/caririncker>.