

5 Ways to Make the Most of LinkedIn

Lindsey Pollack

October 18th, 2010

As a career expert and LinkedIn ambassador I hear the same question over and over again: “*I set up a profile ... now how do I use LinkedIn to jump start my career?*”

Well, you’ve come to the right place! LinkedIn is a powerful way to establish an online identity, build a professional network, and manage your career. But just link in the real world, it’s important to be action-oriented. Here are some tips, based on my experience, that have proven successful for people with a wide variety of career objectives:

1. **Tell people what you’re up to.** As with other popular social networks, LinkedIn offers you the opportunity to share brief status updates with your connections or followers. Because LinkedIn is a *professional* network, you want to make sure your updates are totally professional, too. I think of my status updates like brief conversations I would have at networking events: “I just read a really interesting article you might enjoy: or “I’m attending our industry conference next week. Are you going too?” You never know what nugget might catch someone’s attention and spark a conversation or opportunity.

I once updated my status to let my network know that I was on my way out of Los Angeles from New York. By the time my flight landed, I had a message on my voice mail from a news producer in LA who had seen my LinkedIn update and asked if I could be a guest on his show the next day. Of course I said yes (and updated my status to invite my network to watch the segment!).

2. **Do “small goods.”** I love the advice of Reid Hoffman, cofounder of LinkedIn, who recommends using the site to do “small goods” for other people. I often congratulate my contacts when they mention a new job or client, write a quick answer to a question someone in my industry has posted in the Answers section of LinkedIn or click “like” on an article one of my connections has shared. Networking is best when it’s mutually beneficial, so use LinkedIn to help others and they’re likely to help you in return.
3. **Look up *everyone*.** Dan, a recent college grad from Illinois, shared the following story with me:

“As I approached graduation and a daunting career search during a turbulent economy, I applied for an entry-level program at a prestigious company. Shortly after, I searched for the company on LinkedIn and noticed that my previous supervisor had worked there and happened to know the college recruiting manager.”

“I quickly contacted my previous supervisor and asked for permission to reach out to her. Instead, she wrote a letter of endorsement to the manager and within two days I had a phone interview set up.”

If Dan hadn't searched for this potential employer on LinkedIn, he never would have known he had a great connection just waiting to be tapped. Imagine what connections you might have that you don't know about. Find out by researching every potential employer or networking lead on LinkedIn.

4. **Beef up your expertise on potential employers.** I frequently ask recruiters to share their dos and don'ts for job seekers hoping to work at their companies. One "don't" comes up over and over again: almost every recruiter tells me that his or her biggest pet peeve is when candidates haven't done their homework about the company where they're applying for a position. "Don't ask me to tell you what my company does," said one recruiter friend of mine. "It's your job to find out before you apply here!"

While your first stop in researching an organization is that company's own website, your next destination should be [LinkedIn Company Pages](#). Click on "Follow Company" for each organization you'd like to work for and you'll receive every update that company shares on LinkedIn — new job postings, new hires, promotions and more. Next, scour the company's page and click through to the profiles of the employees featured there. How do they describe their jobs? What keywords do they use? What LinkedIn groups do they belong to? What connections do you have to these people? The more you know about an employer and its employees, the more likely you'll be to get a foot in the door.

5. **Remember your manners.** I'm not sure why, but when certain people log in to social networking websites, they forget that there are other human beings on the other side of those profiles, posts and messages. Just because you're interacting through the computer doesn't mean you should act any differently than you would if you were networking in person. Be polite, authentic and positive. Say please and thank you. Personalize your connection requests and *InMail* messages so your correspondence doesn't feel like spam. And if you wouldn't do it, say it or share it in person, don't do it, say it or share it on LinkedIn.

Above all, remember that LinkedIn is a powerful tool for professionals who are looking to discover opportunities and accelerate their careers. Good luck, and see you on LinkedIn!