

It's Time to Link Up with LinkedIn

By Jean Maslanka Kelley

Mention the phrase “social media” and most people automatically think of Facebook and Twitter. But if you have any dealings in the corporate world—whether you’re a CEO, salesperson, human resource manager, administrative assistant, or anything in between—you’ll want to take a closer look at LinkedIn. You will find it a useful tool to make your business relationships more meaningful...and more profitable.

Before you dismiss the idea of using LinkedIn because you only know it as that “bland” social media site where people go when they’re looking for a job, realize that currently there are 90 million LinkedIn users worldwide. One new user joins every second of every day. And unlike social media sites like Facebook where many people use the site for entertainment, all LinkedIn users are business minded. That means the connections you develop on LinkedIn are more likely to positively impact you or your company in some way. Therefore, if you want better or more professional business relationships, LinkedIn is the place to be. Even if you have a business profile on Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn makes a perfect addition to your personal or business branding efforts.

An Essential Business Resource

The key to making LinkedIn work for you and your company is to use the site regularly. That means posting something, either an update or a question/answer, every seven days at a minimum. Why? Because the more you use any social media site, the higher your “Google Juice” will be—in other words, Google’s algorithm will notice your regularity and you’ll get a higher ranking with Google than you would otherwise. Additionally, the more you interact and post on LinkedIn, the more prominent you’ll become within your network—your name recognition will grow.

Fortunately, staying active in LinkedIn and a regular user is simple when you understand how LinkedIn can benefit you professionally. Use the following ideas and suggestions to make the most of your LinkedIn account.

- **Show off your skills.** It’s as easy to set up your profile in LinkedIn as it is in Facebook. Make sure your profile is well-written and that it highlights what you currently do, what you have done, your strengths, your talents, your key attributes, and your education. Remember that people will access your profile for many different reasons (recruitment, background information, professional contacts, etc.), so be thorough and always make your profile public. Since your LinkedIn profile is essentially a dynamic mini resume, keep it updated, tasteful, and accurate at all times. Additionally, you have an opportunity to display recommendations for you. As a point of etiquette, when you ask someone to write a recommendation, you must reciprocate.
- **Say something meaningful.** By posting status updates that contain valuable content, you show your network that you are a team player and that you care about other people’s success. Remember that status updates are not the place to advertise your company’s products or services, nor is it a conversation group. A better idea is to share a best practice, announce a seminar/event you’ve been to or are going to, or give a quick tip. If you can’t think of anything to post, it’s perfectly acceptable to post a meaningful or motivational quote. The key is to post something interesting and relevant to your network. And always remember that what you post stays on the Internet forever. So if you wouldn’t want your comment on the front page of your local newspaper, don’t post it on LinkedIn.
- **Uncover conversation starters.** LinkedIn is a great place to get an inside glimpse of people. For example, you can look up potential clients or vendors on LinkedIn and see

what kind of books they read, where they went to school, what their main interests are (based on the groups they belong to), and so much more. Now you'll have more to talk about when you meet the potential client, potential vendor, or potential networking friend. Think of LinkedIn as a gateway to have a professional relationship with someone much quicker. In fact, some estimates show that by using LinkedIn to research the people you plan to interact with, you can have a six-month head start on the relationship.

- **Spot trends and hot topics.** There's an amazing amount of real-time information available on LinkedIn. By being a member of various groups that interest you, you can see what people are thinking on a certain topic by the questions they're posting and the responses they're getting. So if you want to know what the current trends or best practices are in lean manufacturing, for example, you could join several lean manufacturing groups on LinkedIn and track each group's activity. You can then use the information you discover in your own company.
- **Get an "in" with top companies.** Whether you're looking for new clients, new vendors, or even a new job, with LinkedIn you can search the companies you want to work with and see who in your network has connections there. You can then ask that person—your connection—for an introduction to a decision maker who can help you. Even if you find that no one in your network has connections with a particular company, perhaps someone in one of your groups works there. That's why it's important to belong to every group that interests you. Continually build your LinkedIn relationships and make those key connections before you actually need them. As Harvey Mackay says, "Dig your well before you're thirsty."

The Missing Link to Your Success

Even though 82 percent of people use some kind of social media regularly, social media itself—including LinkedIn—is much like the Wild West. It's not tame yet, and best practices are still being formed. With that said, if you've spent much of your time on other social media sites and feel they aren't working for building professional relationships, then it's time to give LinkedIn a try.

The key to making LinkedIn work is to work it regularly. Commit to spending at least thirty minutes per day on it, posting your ideas in updates, asking and answering questions, participating in groups, and reaching out to potential connections. Yes, it's one more thing to schedule in your calendar, but by building relationships and gaining new information on people and topics, it's also something that can make your job easier and your company better positioned.

About the Author

Jean Kelley, author and entrepreneur, is the managing director of Jean Kelley Leadership Alliance whose faculty and Trainers have helped more than 750,000 leaders and high potentials up their game at work in the U.S. and Canada. For more information on keynotes, in-house programs, or customized training, email jkelly@jeankelley.com or go to <http://jeankelley.com>.