LinkedIn: A Guide

For today’s episode, we have put together a guide for how best to use LinkedIn as a social media platform. If you have heard of all the benefits but are unsure on how to start using it or what the best practices are, then we have you covered.

LinkedIn is an online networking site geared specifically towards business professionals. With over 850 million members, it is the largest social network in the world. The use of LinkedIn can help you build a professional brand online, which can lead to opportunities and networks you might not have found otherwise.

In addition to showing potential connections your professional profile, LinkedIn allows you to showcase your expertise, recommendations and current network. Your LinkedIn profile provides others with their first professional impression of you, proving your credibility in your field and highlighting your accomplishments. In other words, it’s the best tool out there to find potential candidates, and to showcase yourself professionally. There are still many people who underestimate the importance of LinkedIn in their day-to-day life and are sometimes unwilling to embrace social media in their networking. This guide can hopefully rectify that initial hesitance in creating a profile by giving you the Dos and Don’ts.

# Creating a Profile

## Do

Use a good-quality and professional photo of yourself. You’ll want to look smart and friendly. Smile and look your best and try to use a neutral background.

Add a background image, sometimes known as a cover. While it may seem unimportant, it does add some flavour to your profile. You can add something that shows your personality or your work. For example, pens and paper for a journalist, etc.

Use your headline to show your industry and location. While you don’t need to use all 120 characters, try to give as much info as you’re comfortable with. Your location can be left relatively vague, so no need to enter your home address.

Use your 2,000 characters to provide a clear and impressive summary of yourself. Who are you and what do you do? This will essentially be a portfolio so include some images or videos if you feel these better describe your work better than any words.

Try to provide previous work history, education history, and four or more skills of expertise in your summary. Try to be as specific as possible.

## Don’t

Lie. This could get you in several binds, providing that most people don’t see through your lies on your profile by you not being able to provide direct proof, you could end up in a situation where someone is trying to connect with you based on the information that you provided that was untrue. It could be fairly light, for example if you say you live in Edinburgh but actually live in London, then you may have people in Scotland trying to connect with you.

Look unprofessional. LinkedIn isn’t like any other Social Media platform. The purpose is to create connections. If you made a business card, you wouldn’t use a picture of you in a nightclub, or describe your job inappropriately.

Make claims without backing them up. In your summary, it’s very important to show off what you think your best assets are. For example, if you say that you are a good team player, don’t just say it. Provide evidence and examples of when you have been a good team player.

As you add more elements to your profile, like your picture, your summary, etc. your profile will be considered more completed. There will be a progress bar getting gradually more filled, going from “Beginner” to “All-star”. This is a very helpful way to know how much more to add to your profile and ideally you should be aiming for a fully completed progress bar. Completed LinkedIn profiles get 20 times more views so it will make a serious difference.

# Making Connections

Now it’s time to make use of LinkedIn’s main function – Connections. If you use other Social Media platforms regularly, then this is LinkedIn’s closest thing to a “Friend” or a “Like” on each other’s page. If you make a ‘first-degree’ connection with someone then you have successfully increased the size of your network. You can now message them on LinkedIn like any other social media platform. Where LinkedIn differs though is through its second and third-degree connections. A first-degree connection is where one individual sends a connection request and the other accepts – done. A second-degree connection is everyone who is connected with your first-degree connection that you aren’t, and a third-degree connection are those who are connected to your second-degree connections. It’s a great way of seeing a hub of like-minded people in a similar industry or way of life. You can see those second and third-degree connections and see if you’d like them to be one of your first-degree connections. Here are some Dos and Don’ts for making connections:

## Do

Make connections with like-minded people. A similar industry or field is a great place to start. Connecting with those in your workplace is a very quick and easy solution to starting up your LinkedIn page.

Aim for 50 or more first-degree connections. Your LinkedIn page will appear on external search result rankings and the more first-degree connections that you have the higher you will appear on those rankings.

Make useful connections! There’s no use making a connection and not messaging them. A good way of knowing you’ve got a good connection is if you feel you would both mutually benefit. So make sure the majority of your connections are people you genuinely can offer something to and get something from.

## Don’t

Make connections for the sake of making connections. Sending a request to someone who has no mutual interests or similarities benefits no one involved.

Appear unprofessional in your messages. This one may seem obvious, but continue to act professional even if you feel that you know this connection very well. LinkedIn is a much more formal platform over others so consider connecting on a separate platform if you feel the relationship can be a bit more informal.

# LinkedIn day-to-day usage:

While there isn’t necessarily a guide for how *you,* the reader, should use LinkedIn because we may all be on there for different reasons. We can give you some advice on what general usage of LinkedIn may look like:

If you’re looking for a job through LinkedIn then you’d need to create a network and advertise your expertise as best you can to those people. LinkedIn also has a vacancies section where people are broadcasting their company’s positions which you could browse through. The connections that you make with people will largely depend on how much work experience you have. If you are new to the job hunting world, then your old friends/peers at university, college, school are a good starting point. Then you may want to consider connecting with tutors, friends and family who are experienced in the world of work. Then you will want to look for posts on LinkedIn that are advertising job fairs, meet and greets, etc. and consider attending.

 If you are looking for jobseekers on behalf of your business then you could start by creating the aforementioned positions in LinkedIn’s Jobs section. Just having the positions available to see isn’t enough though as you may already be showing off these positions on Indeed, TotalJobs, etc. You will need to create some engaging content to post throughout LinkedIn to advertise the position. When the post gains traction, so will the job opening. Where do you post the content though? You can post it through your own page, but this will only be broadcast to your connections. If you have been working hard and have made a big network, then maybe that’s going to a lot of people but for those of you who have just started up your LinkedIn or just simply don’t have the largest network, then consider posting to groups. Groups are a good way of getting likeminded people together without needing to search through names upon names. The group could be simply named “Job Openings in Kent” or something similar. If you have a job that was available in Kent, then this would be the perfect group for you. Be wary when posting in groups that usually it is controlled by one person in particular. This means you can be kicked or removed from the group if that person believes you are not obeying the rules of the group.

# Posting on LinkedIn

This is a good segue into how to post onto LinkedIn. Now we have gone over the expected behaviour and etiquette on LinkedIn, how should you go about constructing your posts? Well we have made a few steps on what you can do to improve your content.

Step one: Decide on your post length

There isn’t a better length of post for LinkedIn. Both long and short posts have their uses and you need to decide what kind of length you’d like to go for depending on the content you are discussing.

A quick post is going to be snappy and easy to read. It will be striking when compared to many other posts that readers will see on LinkedIn so it will really stick out. Alternatively, a very long post will grab the attention. If people have the time they will be more inclined to read it out of curiosity, to see where it goes.

Step two: Keep your content fresh

To add onto step one, you don’t want to always be posting the same type of content. You don’t want to only post long stories or quick one-sentence posts as then people will grow tired of it. Long posts take time to read and write and short stories lack substance in some cases. You want a good mix of your available options to keep people on their toes. This doesn’t just go for word count, of course. You can include some media content like pictures, videos, gifs, etc.

There is also the matter of trends on social media. Some media gets more attention than others, even just for a brief moment. You may want to follow these trends and reap the rewards, but it’s important to keep on top of these trends and keep your content fresh.

Step three: Include Hashtags in your posts

This certainly isn’t an idea that is unique to LinkedIn with a majority of Social Media platforms now including hashtags as an easy and user-friendly way of categorising your post. Think of a hashtag as a community. People can choose to follow certain hashtags so that they can keep up with content that is of interest to them. That means when you put a hashtag on your post, it will appear on that hashtag’s feed.

This means you can broadcast your post to a large group of people without the need of them following you. This could then lead to many new followers if they enjoy your content or it continues to be relevant to them, or simply more engagement as a whole. The challenge comes from picking the *right* hashtags though.

Some hashtags are very vague or basic and therefore have a considerably larger following – these hashtags might be something like #Careers or #Future. They cover a much larger array of content because of their vague topic. By all means you should include these hashtags in your posts as you always want your post to reach as large an audience as possible. However, there are so many posts going to these hashtags that it won’t have the best chances.

There are much more specific hashtags that will have a much more niche audience viewing them. That means less overall competition for the hashtag and a likely chance of your post being seen by people following that specific hashtag. The important thing to do at this stage is making sure the hashtag is definitely relevant to your post as it can otherwise have a negative impact of people complaining about why this post is on their feed.

So having a good blend of more niche hashtags that are relevant to your content, and the more popular and larger following hashtags will give you the advantages of both. Aim for about five hashtags or more if you believe that they are all relevant to your content.

Step four: Be consistent

This doesn’t mean that you need to be posting every day. LinkedIn is not designed around that and in fact has one of the largest post lifespans of any social media platform. This means your content may still be cycling around long after you originally posted it.

The important thing about consistency on LinkedIn is establishing a schedule and sticking to it. Maybe you do choose to post once a day but you should only do this if you feel confident you can stick to it, remaining consistent to your post schedule will keep your page relevant and also build trust with your audience

Step five: Setting up the right account

Depending on the aims of your posting, you may want to consider setting up a LinkedIn page instead of a LinkedIn profile. A page is run by a profile so you’ll still need to setup a LinkedIn profile either way, but a profile itself is built for an individual.

The main difference between the two is that a page can be followed by anyone without needing to accept a request for a connection whereas a profile requires much more micro-management since you need to accept every request. In other words, if you’re running a business profile then you may want to consider running a page instead. You want people to be interacting with your page and your posts without the need of a mutual connection. One of the more important features of a page comes from people being able to view the content you publish without following the page. That leads to much more engagement but also means people can share your content on their own profiles.

A profile is still considerably useful to post from though. It’s considerably more personal and if you have garnered a good following then people will more likely interact with your posts over those from a page. Providing you have built up a lot of trust then a profile will have considerably more impactful posts to its followers whereas a page may go ignored. Depending on how you want your content to interact with its audience, you may need to make a choice on whether to post on a profile or a page.

With those steps in mind, you should be ready to make your posts on LinkedIn. A good reputation is essential to success on LinkedIn. Thus, it's important to appear professional at all times. Personal posts about a holiday away, what you just cooked, the latest gossip that you just heard, and much more are fine for a platform like Facebook but not LinkedIn. There isn't a specific rule against this, but it's a matter of etiquette. People will remove their connection with you if you begin to irritate them or break unspoken rules

You should only make, or ask for, an introduction if you believe it is beneficial for both parties. However, you need to be careful as your reputation and your organisation's reputation should always be taken into consideration.

When discussing your achievements, don't embellish the facts, and avoid overselling yourself! Honesty is the best policy!