



Features

SocialPro: How to Master LinkedIn

By Matt Alderton | Published: Monday, April 29, 2013



You've already created your LinkedIn profile. Here are tips for maximizing its potential.

Whether you're a new college graduate or a veteran RD, your LinkedIn profile has the power to fast-track your career. Used to its full potential, it can attract employers, generate new clients, enhance your credibility, establish you as a thought leader and increase your industry knowledge. Underutilized, however, it sends a message of absenteeism and neglect, potentially resulting in missed opportunities.

To make sure LinkedIn is helping and not hurting your career, follow these best practices for optimizing your profile, your presence and your network.

Your Profile

Your LinkedIn profile is reaching its full potential only when it's 100 percent complete. Don't forget to include:

- **A photo:** Although a corporate headshot isn't required, photos should be more professional than personal. For that reason, avoid photos that include pets, goofy expressions, inappropriate clothing or loud backgrounds.
- **A headline:** By default, your most recent job title is your LinkedIn headline. Consider changing it into a personal branding statement that reflects who you are and what you have to offer.
- **Experience:** The most effective LinkedIn profiles read like resumes, not memoirs. Just like a good resume, your work experience is best presented in bulleted form so recruiters, prospects and other contacts can quickly search, scan and scroll their way through it.
- **Skills and expertise:** A newer LinkedIn feature, called "endorsements," allows your connections to endorse you for the skills you've listed in your profile. Therefore, be sure to include a comprehensive list of skills for which you want to be known.
- **Recommendations:** Ask clients, employers and colleagues for [recommendations](#) that speak to your skills, experience and character traits; at least one should be from a current or former manager.
- **Recent information:** You should update your LinkedIn profile with something new — a new project you're working on, perhaps, a new skill you've acquired or a link to a new blog post you've written — at least once a week, demonstrating to your network that you're actively engaged in your career and in the LinkedIn community.

Your Presence

Equally important as having a complete profile is making it easily available to those who want to view it. With that in mind, you should increase your profile's visibility by:

- **Making your profile public:** Although you can keep it private, [making your LinkedIn profile public](#) allows it to appear in Internet search results, which maximizes your exposure.
- **Claiming your vanity URL:** When you create your profile, LinkedIn automatically generates a web address for it — sometimes with a lot of confusing numbers at the end. You can make your profile easier to find and share by [customizing its URL](#). For the best results, choose your name or a variation of it.
- **Using keywords:** When you write your LinkedIn profile, pepper it with the keywords you want to be associated with. If you specialize in celiac disease, for instance, make sure your profile includes terms like "wheat," "gluten-free" and "food allergies" so your profile will show up when people search LinkedIn for those terms.
- **Creating a profile badge:** If you have your own website or blog, adding a [profile badge](#) that links to your LinkedIn profile will help you grow your network.

Your Network

LinkedIn is all about networking. Just like a live event, that requires working the room. Here are a few tips to help you break the ice:

- **Connect with purpose:** When you want to connect with someone, send them a request. Although LinkedIn provides a template message, you'll get better results if you customize your request with a personalized message that politely explains who you are and why you want to connect (e.g., to ask advice or to stay in touch after a convention).
- **Seek introductions:** It's generally considered bad form to request a connection with someone you don't know or have never met. To connect with strangers, therefore, it's best to look for a connection you have in common, then ask that person for an introduction using the "Get Introduced" feature.
- **Update your status:** Like other social networks, LinkedIn allows you to post status updates. Status updates shouldn't be personal, however; instead, serve your network by sharing work-related anecdotes, links, job leads and questions.
- **Identify yourself:** Change your [LinkedIn settings](#) so that others can see when you've viewed their profile. Although it might sound like stalking, people who see you've viewed their profile are likely to view yours in return, opening the door to conversations and connections.
- **Join groups:** Joining [LinkedIn Groups](#) — groups for people who work in the same profession, who went to the same school and who have the same interests — allows you to chat with group members, exchange resources with them and view their profiles, even if you're not connected to them.
- **Install applications:** Browse LinkedIn's [Application Directory](#) for apps with which to enrich your profile. A SlideShare app, for instance, lets public speakers showcase their presentations while an Events app makes it possible to discover live events your connections are attending. These apps and others provide resources, points of entry and conversation starters that are useful in networking.

Ultimately, participation and reciprocation are the keys to successfully using LinkedIn: Those who are most active on LinkedIn get the most out of it. Likewise, those who give their contacts recommendations, advice and introductions are most likely to receive the same in return.

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