

Whitepaper

Become An Expert Online Networker; Get The Best Out of LinkedIn

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Following LinkedIn's latest [announcement](#) that users are now able to segment their network of contacts in a variety of more granular ways, this whitepaper has been created to identify a number of techniques for getting the most out of one of the original mainstream social networks, LinkedIn.

This paper is divided into three sequential sections, which respectively cover:

- ***Part 1: Creating Your LinkedIn Presence***
- ***Part 2: Developing Your LinkedIn Network***
- ***Part 3: Utilising Your LinkedIn Network***

Part 1: Creating Your LinkedIn Presence

The starting point of an effective LinkedIn strategy is clearly to work on developing one or more effective profiles within the site – which might comprise a personal profile, a corporate profile and/or indeed creating a themed group.

- *Personal* – LinkedIn offers a number of suggestions for how to continually develop a personal profile, offering a percentage scale up to a fully completed profile as an indication of the completeness of a profile. LinkedIn recently confirmed an agreement with Twitter so, when creating a profile, Twitter users should not only ensure that they have added their Twitter name but also synchronise the two profiles, as LinkedIn will then show Twitter updates within its status updates section, effectively keeping the content fresh.

As with any other marketing document, what others say is often regarded by readers as more valuable than any other aspect of the content – so when developing contacts, as per the next section, users should ask their contacts for recommendations, that will sit on the profile. Recommendations can be vetted and approved before going live, so it can't hurt to ask.

- *Company* – Company profiles are short, objective and factually-accurate overviews of a business, which individuals can then apply to join. This is an excellent method of providing a central focal point for an organisation, which helps businesses to be found through the site and also for larger organisations to cross-network with colleagues.
- *Group* – A group potentially represents the most significant time investment in LinkedIn as it requires ongoing effort – but consequently it represents perhaps the most valuable way of growing a network on a one-to-many basis. Groups tend to be based around a theme – which might be geographically specific or based around an interest, for example. Setting up a group is simple – the challenge is in thereafter curating interesting content to act as a [social object](#) which others will gravitate to, discuss and share, thereby extending the value of the group founder's network (along with others in the group, potentially).

Having decided on and created the desired presence on LinkedIn, the next stage, which is ongoing throughout one's usage of the site, is to develop the number of connections.

Part 2: Developing Your LinkedIn Network

Interestingly, as LinkedIn is largely based around existing, real world connections and relationship unlike other social sites, what represents a large number of contacts on a site such as Twitter is actually very different to that on LinkedIn.

Whilst a recent story claimed that more than [82% of Twitter users have less than 100 'followers'](#), it is nevertheless relatively common to see individuals with thousands or indeed tens of thousands of twitter followers. However, the fact that LinkedIn effectively stops counting at 500, and simply presents the number of connections an individual has as '500+' at that point, indicates that this is far from the norm and that there are clear [demographic distinctions between social communities](#). (NB – interestingly, the [LinkedIn iPhone app](#) presents the information differently to the main site, making it easier to see how many connections a user has).

There are a number of techniques to adopt in order to swiftly grow a network – however these all require a degree of time investment. However, the result is a robust network of actual relationships which is potentially far more valuable than any automated approach.

- *Email Footer* – Once the profile has been created - and preferably once the user's personal url has been claimed, ie <http://www.linkedin.com/in/petegoold> – add this to outgoing email signatures. Not only will this act as a prompt for any potential recipients that are interested in growing their own network but it also has the side benefit of ensuring that the profile url is readily available at a moment's notice, without having to search on the web.
- *Cross Reference With Email* – Once or twice a week, devote five minutes to taking a look at your inbox and consider whether the senders of any emails may be additional targets for LinkedIn. Simply insert the user's name into the search bar of your LinkedIn profile when logged in to find the user, click 'add to network', insert their email address and click 'send'.
- *Use LinkedIn's Recommendations* – Once a request has been sent, LinkedIn provides a helpful list of recommendations for additional connections. Again, be sure to send requests to any known contacts in this list, which ensures that LinkedIn provides further suggestions. *Use The Outlook Toolbar* – This may not be to all tastes as it may slow down standard usage, but Outlook users can now add a simple [Outlook toolbar plugin](#) which indicates which email-based contacts can be added as LinkedIn connections.
- *Or, Use Xobni* - Other tools such as [Xobni](#), are free to use and provide details of LinkedIn profiles, along with other information, such as phone numbers and Facebook profiles, enabling the user to add each quickly
- *Sync with twitter* – As mentioned in the first section about creating profiles, Twitter users should be sure to synchronise the LinkedIn profile with Twitter, which will allow Twitter updates to be posted in the LinkedIn status section, thereby providing regular content for the growing network to view.

Having created the personal, corporate presences and whilst continuing to develop the network, the third step, which is the point of the whole exercise, is to then utilise the growing network.

Part 3: Utilising Your LinkedIn Network

Whilst LinkedIn does serve as a virtual representation of one's business network, the site offers a great deal of possibilities particularly around the theme of [crowdsourcing](#) information. Moreover, once a network is developed, in many ways it is far more effective than a traditional, physical networking forum in terms of delivering high-calibre, relevant and useful information quickly.

- *Business Advice* – Most obviously, LinkedIn is a terrific source of commercially-useful advice – from finding a pay-as-you-go conference call service, to looking to find a professional services specialist, such as a lawyer.
- *Sourcing Jobs* – LinkedIn is a highly fertile forum for finding jobs, not least because it's all based on word-of-mouth. LinkedIn offers a simple means of passing jobs on and by participating in this, even if the user is not actually looking, at some point they may well be grateful of this service. As with all networking, helpful networkers are always the first to be helped when they're looking for it.
- *Surveys* – LinkedIn offers a great way to canvas a network's opinion quickly – through its polling feature. Unless connections number in the tens of thousands – and for reasons [mentioned previously](#) and in the second section, that's highly unlikely – then the survey is far more likely to be qualitative than quantitative, but nevertheless, it's potentially extremely useful market intelligence which can be used for any number of commercial purposes, such as to support sales or marketing documents, for example.
- *Additional Route of Contact* – As every email user knows, sometimes email simply doesn't work. Whether a specific web-service is down, a mail-server is being problematic or a spam filter has been over sensitive in blocking a specific email address, having the contact in LinkedIn affords the user another route to contact.
- *Manage Events and Schedule Meetings* – Utilise LinkedIn's event management function to invite the network to forthcoming events or meetings directly, thereby keeping the relationships in the real world, in addition to maintaining the virtual connection.
- *Distribute Sales & Marketing Collaterals* – Through features such as the White Paper tool, marketing collaterals can be either distributed generally, directly to an individual or indeed roadtested before mass distribution through other channels.

There is no doubt that LinkedIn is one of the most commercially effective social networks. The connections are typically based on real-world relationships and therefore the site simply carries more weight, particularly in terms of communications between two businesses, than other social sites. Moreover, based on the last few months being extremely active for LinkedIn, with the launch of new apps, an outlook toolbar, a commercial relationship with Twitter, it looks as though the site is gearing up to push further ahead as a leader in the space throughout 2010.

About The Author

Pete Goold is the Managing Director of Punch Communications, a UK-based [PR agency](#) which also specialises in [search marketing](#) and social media outreach. Punch works with [clients](#) in Europe, the US and elsewhere around the globe to manage their reputations both on and offline.

Having been in the PR industry for 15 years, Pete is a passionate evangelist about the adoption of [Digital PR](#) techniques alongside traditional PR and media relations activities.

For more information regarding LinkedIn or any other aspect of [social media outreach](#) please contact Punch Communications on 01858 411600.

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